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HESTER KIRTON.

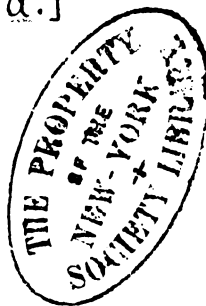
BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A BAD BEGINNING," "CHESTERFORD,"

ETC. ETC.

[Mrs. K. S. Macquoid.]

He who the sword of Heaven will bear,
Should be as holy as severe ;—
More nor less to others paying,
Than by self-offences weighing.—SHAKESPEARE.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

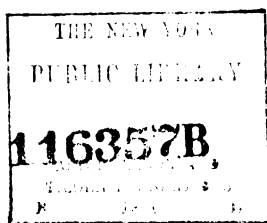
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BOOK THE SECOND.



HESTER HALLAM.

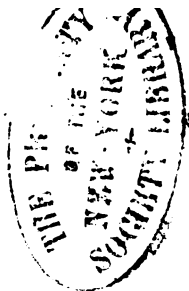


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HESTER KIRTON.

CHAPTER I.

MARRIED.

"HELENA, do you remember Hallam, your devoted admirer last season?"

"I am not aware that I encourage 'devoted admirers,'" said Lady Helena Fortescue, with the deliberate manner some women have when they tell a falsehood, and are determined not to be contradicted, "but I remember your friend Mr. Hallam perfectly."

Captain Fortescue looked hard at his sister-in-law, but he looked with a certain admiration also, for her coolness surpassed belief; she met his eyes unflinchingly—her virtue was unimpeachable

—and if she liked admiration she was not obliged to confess it to her brother-in-law.

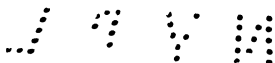
“Well, we won’t argue the point,” and he laughed; “he went abroad suddenly last winter—I never inquired much about it—his man of business was very mum on the subject. I heard he was well, so I thought it best not to be inquisitive, thinking he would turn up again in a month or so, or I should hear from him.”

“And have you not done so?”

Lady Helena thought her brother-in-law was getting prosy. Spite of the contemptuous way in which she had spoken of Hallam, she had liked his attentions, and was interested about him.

“Not a syllable, though I had suspicions of what has happened; but yesterday I met Mrs. Hallam, his mother, and I asked her where Fred was, and what he had been about—had he married? The question seemed thoroughly to upset her; however, after a bit she recovered herself, and told me she was just going home: would I come with her? She lives in Wilton Place; you know; I’ve been there once or twice before.”

His sister-in-law looked oppressed with the



length of his story, and took little pains to conceal her impatience ; however, he went on.

“ She told me all about it ; that sly Fred has married a fortune.”

“ Indeed ! ” She shrugged her beautiful shoulders. “ I hope there is not an old woman tacked to it.”

“ A very pretty young one ; don’t look incredulous, Helena, there is a *but*, although not about age. His mother’s distress is that she knows the bride is perfectly uncouth and unformed ; in fact, she has made her out in her own mind a sort of country bumpkin ; but she has not seen her, and no doubt exaggerates the evil, for we know how *exigeante* the mothers of only sons are apt to be. However, one thing is certain, the girl is not well-born.”

“ But where did he meet with her ? while he was on the continent ? ”

A little interest showed through her indifference now.

“ No, it seems he heard of her last summer, went down with an introduction to the father, who by-the-by was an old miser, and when he died suddenly soon after—and here comes the old story

—Hallam displayed a wonderful amount of interest in the poor little creature, who, of course, fell in love with him, and they were married.”

“I don’t think she is to be pitied,” said Lady Helena, “if she be what her mother-in-law says, and those rich girls are always ugly or unre-fined; no doubt, it is a great catch for her to have married your friend.”

“I don’t know,” said Fortescue, slowly, “I never can find it in my heart to congratulate a woman on being married for her money, as I shrewdly suspect this one was.”

“Ah, and how about the money, is it his or hers?”

“Oh! the guardian saw to that. Goldsmith—you know Goldsmith—he does things for Gerald; he has not chosen to give Fred the whip-hand, although I believe they have something handsome to start with; the rest is tied up till she’s of age.”

“Her guardian! why, Percy, it seems a pity you did not find out this treasure, instead of letting your friend get the start of you.”

“Thank you, no. I don’t think even gilded awkwardness and ignorance would reconcile me to either.”

"At any rate, your friend is fortunate in some ways; if she's young, no doubt he does very much as he likes, but how long have they been married, and where are they now?"

"Mrs. Hallam was not explicit about dates; my own notion is that they were married early in the winter, and that he took her abroad at once; at any rate, they have only just returned, and are in lodgings in Gloucester Place. But Mrs. Hallam either would not, or could not, tell me the number. I think she repented having told me so much."

"Perhaps he means to polish his diamond a little before he introduces her," said Lady Helena, pityingly. "What a fate he has doomed himself to."

Captain Fortescue did not answer; he was unusually quiet during the rest of the evening, and as his brother went to sleep after dinner, his sister-in-law found him a dull companion, and was glad when he took his leave earlier than usual.

As he went down the steps, his mental exclamation betrayed where his thoughts had been wandering during the evening.

"I'll dine with them to-morrow."

When he reached his lodgings, he found a note

on his table from Mrs. Hallam, begging him not to mention to any one anything she might have said, in her agitation, about her son's marriage, at least anything unfavourable. She had felt so overpowered at having to communicate the intelligence to her beloved Frederick's dearest friend, that she feared she had said far more than she was justified in saying. She had only meant to express that her new daughter was rather unused to society. She heard she was very charming, quite what her son's wife ought to be, &c. &c. The letter ended by hinting that the young couple were so much devoted to each other, at present, that they did not intend to visit.

Captain Fortescue's lip curled.

"You are a day too late, Mrs. Hallam, and unless Fred keeps his wife under lock and key, I prefer to judge her with my own eyes."

CHAPTER II.

MRS. FREDERIC HALLAM.

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE did dine next day in Gloucester Place. He went to call on Mr. Goldsmith to ascertain the truth of Mrs. Hallam's story, and met his friend coming out of the lawyer's office.

He thought Hallam tried to avoid him at first, but Fortescue was not going to be put off easily. His warm greeting and hearty congratulations were irresistible, and they were soon walking westward, arm-in-arm, on the old friendly terms.

Hallam scarcely mentioned his wife, and seemed rather anxious to avoid Fortescue's congratulations; after he had asked him to come to them at seven, and be introduced to Mrs. Hallam, he changed the subject so abruptly, that Fortescue could not return to it.

His curiosity was now fully roused, but he was confounded, when, instead of the awkward country bumpkin he expected to see, he was presented to a slender, gracefully formed girl, whose deep mourning dress heightened the beauty of her very transparent complexion.

"By Jove, she's lovely!" he mentally exclaimed, as a second glance told him she had pretty eyes and delicate, well-cut features.

But what most surprised Fortescue, a fastidious judge of manner, was her calm self-possession and the repose of her attitude. There was no restlessness, no fidgeting, none of the awkward shyness of a country girl.

She was silent certainly, but a young bride is not expected to be talkative; she answered easily and naturally, however, when he spoke to her.

By-and-by, during the dinner, he noticed that, when spoken to by her husband, Mrs. Hallam's cheeks flushed, and an evident desire to please gave a nervous hesitation to her manner, and whenever this happened, Fortescue also remarked that his friend's cheerfulness seemed to flag, and that he became silent and pre-occupied. He knew or guessed how shy Hester was, and he was

dreading that she would break down in utter confusion; but he had yet to learn the strength of will with which his wife controlled all outward manifestation of terror, for she felt really afraid of Captain Fortescue, knowing him to be the "grandest" as well as the most intimate of her husband's friends.

"Do you intend to live in town, Mrs. Hallam?"

"I hardly know yet," said Hester, and she looked across the table at her husband.

Hallam turned his head quickly to speak to the servant standing behind his chair, and Fortescue felt that the movement was intentional. He could not imagine what was the matter with his friend; it was impossible he could be ashamed of such a wife as that; he had never seen him in so unsocial a humour.

"Do you like London or the country?" he said to Mrs. Hallam.

"I don't know yet," she said, with a smile. "I have always lived in the country; London seems very black and dirty."

"You are in a dull part of town here; if you were nearer the parks you would like it better,

but you will find plenty to amuse you soon—there will be all sorts of things going on in another week or so: the opera, balls, exhibitions, and so forth. I suppose, as you have lived in the country, the opera will be new to you?”

Hallam was listening now, and was evidently determined his wife should not answer.

“Ah, yes, Hester, we’ll go to the opera some night soon. I hate lionizing with all my heart, it’s an awful bore; but I don’t mind the opera for once in a way.”

Mrs. Hallam smiled up at her husband—she looked prettier than ever. Fortescue thought if he had so charming a wife he should never be able to refuse her anything she wished for; when she looked at her husband, there was such an infinite trust and reverence mingled with the timid affection he had noticed at first.

Hallam was watching him, and was evidently gratified at the attention paid to his wife.

“I tell you what, Fortescue, you’d better go with us to the opera. We’ll have a box, you know, and then you’ll tell Hester all about it: I’m a horrid fellow for taking people about; it bores me to death.”

But it evidently was not the prospect of going to the opera that had so pleased Mrs. Hallam. She did not look vexed or disappointed now, but a shade came over the brightness of her face, and the timid, uncertain look returned.

Much as he liked to look at her, and interested as he felt, Fortescue was not sorry when she left the dinner-table. Hallam made no allusion to his wife or to his marriage, so his friend did not like to mention either. Fred's thoughts seemed to be full of betting and making up a party for Tatton races.

"I thought new-married men gave up that sort of thing," said his friend, after listening to him for some time.

"What! races? Not a bit of it. Why, Hester's as fond of horses as I am, and takes quite an interest in them."

"I don't mean races, but betting. I've given it up, although I'm not married, and if you'd take my advice, Fred, you'd do the same."

"Ah, it's all very well, my dear fellow: you've had your fling, and I'd have made you such a promise cheerfully six months ago; but, you see, times are altered now. It would be hard, indeed,

to grudge me a little sport the first time I've had the chance of going into it properly. By George!" he said, rubbing his hands, and looking more like himself than he had done since the beginning of dinner, "it will be glorious. I say, old fellow, you'll go down too, won't you?"

"No," said Fortescue, laughing; "I tell you I've cut the whole concern, and I can't put myself in the way of temptation even for you, old fellow."

"Well, but if you go with me you may keep me out of mischief."

"You know better than that, Fred: you always take your own way, and pretend to take advice all the while. Besides, I'm not going to stand by with empty pockets and see you venturing your thousands, Mr. Millionnaire."

Hallam muttered something which sounded like "I wish they were thousands;" but they were just going up-stairs, and his friend did not catch his distinct meaning:

He thought, for a newly-married man, Hallam was singularly inattentive to his wife. At the tea-table he had no little cares for her, and she seemed accustomed to dispense with them, and was rising to take her husband's tea-cup across

the room, when Fortescue offered his assistance. She thanked him in evident surprise.

"Ah, you'll spoil Hester," said Hallam, lazily, as he met Fortescue half-way and took the cup from him. "You see she doesn't care about that sort of thing."

"No," she answered. "I've always been used to wait on myself. I don't think I should like the trouble of many servants."

"Are servants a trouble?" said Fortescue, amused at her simplicity. "I hear people say so sometimes, but to me they seem to take all trouble off one's hands——"

"You see," said Hallam, interposing; he was lying now full length on a sofa, "we've been living in hotels ever since we've been married, so we know nothing of housekeeping yet." He looked at his wife as he spoke, but she was pouring out another cup of tea and did not meet his eye.

"Well, perhaps I know nothing about it," she said, as if fearing she had spoken presumptuously. "I've never been used to more than one servant, so I don't know much about the trouble they give."

"Hester, are you ever going to give me another cup of tea?" said her husband, in a peremptory tone that seemed to startle her. She went for his cup at once, and Fortescue was too wise to relieve her of the trouble this time. She looked pale and nervous when she returned to her seat, and there was a perceptible restraint during the rest of the evening.

When Fortescue rose to go, Hallam said he should walk part of the way with him and have a cigar.

They walked on some time in silence, and then Fortescue said,—

"How about the office, Fred; do you go there again now?"

"Not I; do you think I should ever have taken a wife, unless I could shake off desk slavery? no, I'm a free man for the rest of my life, barring old Goldsmith's interference."

"Really; but I hoped you had done with him."

"No such luck: the fact is, Percy," he said, with more of his old frank manner than he had shown previously, "the old fellow has not used me fairly, I think. He set me all square to start,

that was to his own advantage, as you know ; but he's so managed matters, or he pretends that old Kirton so managed them, that not one penny can either my wife or I touch till she comes of age, without the old parchment's consent."

"And how do you live at present?"

"Oh, he makes us a tolerable allowance ; it would suit a moderate man like you, without encumbrance ; but the truth is, I shall soon be as hard up as ever. At present my wife, of course, doesn't want money, which is lucky."

Fortescue did not answer ; he was wondering whether he could ever have consented to give up his independence and live on his wife's fortune.

"I say, Percy, don't be so strait-laced, but change your mind and go down with me. I've half promised to buy Hester a saddle-horse with some of my winnings ; won't that be generous ?"

Fortescue laughed.

"Ah, you don't see the generosity of buying her presents with her own money : but you forget, —what I gain by betting is my own, my own legitimate lawful earnings ; besides, I hold with the old saying, what's hers is mine and what's mine's my own."

He threw away the end of his cigar and twirled his long silky moustaches.

“And when Mrs. Hallam comes of age, how is the property settled then?”

“Oh—that was all done in the father’s will: the money is absolutely tied on Hester and her children, not giving me even a life interest without her consent and Goldsmith’s; but of course I shall see that I have the control of the property then; if people understand each other, you know, these things are easily settled between man and wife. I don’t doubt Goldsmith, but I like to be my own master, and if he continues to manage affairs afterwards, this might be difficult, and he might make mischief between me and Hester.”

“I see, but will Mrs. Hallam consent to such a plan? Do you know in your place I should be glad that my wife’s money was out of my power.”

“Ah; but then, Fortescue, you are romantic; you always were. I am a calm, common-place—selfish if you like—man of business, and when I want money it seems to me pleasanter to find it in my own pocket than in any one else’s;

besides, what can a woman know about business? If you were in my place you'd think just as I do. It's one of the most wonderful things in human nature to me the way in which people's judgment always is biassed by the different position from which they look at things." This seemed to Frederic Hallam an unanswerable assertion.

"Hardly always; there must be such things as abstract right and abstract wrong."

"I told you just now you were romantic, you jump so to extremes. There can be nothing wrong in any case that I was thinking of. If you study human nature a little you will find that self-interest is the universal law on which people found their opinions. I'm not talking of boys, but even in their case the same argument holds good: in betting for instance; they think it advantageous—a good speculation—or they wouldn't do it."

"I don't think so; they bet for the fun and excitement of the thing, and because others do it."

"Not a bit of it. Besides, my dear fellow, I was just going to prove to you that it's nothing

but self-interest—in other words, what we each think right—that makes you and me differ on this point: you, having outgrown the delusive visions of boyhood, see plainly that betting is too great a risk; I, on the contrary, being able to stand against the risk if I have ordinary luck, see in it a sure means of profit. It is wrong in your eyes because ruinous, and right in mine from the opposite reason; and, if you watch people closely, you will see this carried out in other things besides betting. ‘What’s one man’s meat is another man’s poison,’ is true enough in many ways.”

“Well,” said his friend; he knew Fred too well to argue with him in one of these moods, “I shall bid you good-night, or Mrs. Hallam will forbid my visits if I keep her sitting up for you.”

“Not she—she’s in excellent training. My dear Fortescue, it must be a man’s own fault if his wife sits up for him. Always begin your married life as you mean it to go on, and you’ll find no trouble. A fellow must be a fool who can’t manage his own wife.”

He laughed with the happy self-consciousness

of success in his own case, and, after shaking hands with his friend, walked home, meditating on his betting arrangements.

"I wish I could get Fortescue to go down with me," he said. "I don't half like the set I've got; but there's one comfort, I was never yet done in my life—they must be knowing hands to trick me, I think."

And then his thoughts went back to Goldsmith. He was not satisfied with that cautious gentleman's treatment of him—he must see him to-morrow.

Before the marriage, when money matters had been settled between them, the income that Goldsmith had named as sufficient for himself and his wife, till the latter came of age, had seemed to him then liberal and adequate; but since his return from the Continent he had discovered that it was quite impossible they could live on it—at any rate in London. He knew very well that Hester longed for a country life, and Goldsmith had hinted his willingness to purchase an estate for them before she attained her majority, if they would undertake to reside upon it; but the notion of sinking into a mere

country squire was intolerable to Hallam. His wife was attentive, and dutiful, and loving, but to be shut up with her in a country house from month's end to month's end would be a penance he was resolved not to inflict on himself. As far as he could see, they had not a single pursuit or sympathy in common, except that Hester was fond of riding. He smiled to himself as he wondered what pursuits or tastes she had; except reading and plain sewing, which he detested to see a woman engaged in, she did not appear to do anything like other women of her age. He had given her music lessons in Rome, but they seemed wasted—she had a defective ear both for time and tune, he had laughed at her failures, and she had soon given up. He was not sorry for it: he was an accomplished musician himself, and had a rich and highly-cultivated tenor voice, and he knew that Hester had wished to learn music that she might play the accompaniments of his songs—a notion which made him shudder when he found she was not acutely sensible of the difference in sound between one note and another. Had she persevered, possibly this faculty might in some degree have been

cultivated. Her strong will would have helped much towards it, but at present that will was chained to her husband's likings : it was enough for her if he expressed disapproval, and, as he evidently shrank from her musical attempts, she discontinued them.

He proposed that she should have lessons in drawing, but she would not attempt this. She said when she and Lucy had tried together as children to copy the cows and pigs in the farm-yard, Lucy's effort had always succeeded, while hers had remained the most incomprehensible hieroglyphics ; but she told him if he would let her take lessons in French and German, and give her a good English governess, she should be very thankful.

Hallam shrugged his shoulders at her want of taste ; he thought accomplishments the most suitable pursuits for a lady. Study of any more earnest kind, he had always fancied detestable ; however, it would serve to amuse her, and take her off his hands, for he found her a dull companion, and was always in terror when they were in Paris, or any frequented city, lest he should meet some English friends, and be compelled to

introduce her to them, in her unfledged state, as he called it. So he told her she was welcome to do as she pleased, provided she did not grow clever and turn into a blue stocking.

Without reasoning the why and wherefore to himself, he felt that the money spent on these lessons had not been wasted. Her manner of speaking had greatly improved; but for that one little allusion to her home life, he had been surprised and pleased at her behaviour with Fortescue, a man whom of all others, he considered likely to make an uncouth person nervous, from the excessive courtesy of his own manner.

He might have known if he had reflected—for Frederic Hallam had plenty of sense, although he chose his own way of using it—that probably his friend's extreme deference and courtesy to Hester had done more to give her self-possession than any mental effort on her own part. The pleasure of being appreciated before her husband, and by his particular friend, had made her very happy.

Hallam wondered if she would be as collected if he took her to see his mother; if so, the sooner it was over the better. He had that morning

received a note inviting him to do so, and hinting that after what he had said of his wife, perhaps the more she saw of her mother-in-law the better. The note had not pleased him, and he had destroyed it without comment, although Hester had looked up expectantly, when he said it was from his mother. Suppose he took her there to-morrow, and if they seemed to get on pretty well together, left her there for the day. Of course he should not do so if the poor girl seemed shy or frightened, for Frederic Hallam meant to be an exemplary husband—from his point of view—and as to being unkind to Hester, he was determined that he would neither be so himself, nor permit it in others; no, not even in his mother, and the sooner she knew it the better. Of course he must check his wife, and reprove her for such a *gaucherie* as she had committed this evening, and he was not afraid that, once warned, she would make the same mistake again.

But then there was Goldsmith to be seen after. How could he take Hester to Wilton Place, and see him as well, for Mrs. Hallam had expressly said he was to bring his wife in the morning, and he knew her too well to transgress in a trifling matter

of time or place, although he would not have hesitated about anything more serious.

“This comes of getting married,” he said, as he opened the door with his latch-key; “it is such a bore to have to take women anywhere.”

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW OF A CLOUD.

HESTER had attained her wish: she was married to a man whom she loved, and she was fast gaining, by undaunted perseverance and energy, the educational advantages she had so longed for.

When she found her father was indeed taken from her, the first impulse, when she recovered from this sudden blow, had been to write to her uncle and aunt Wrenshaw; she never thought of Mr. Goldsmith, but Mr. Wrenshaw did; and before he obeyed his niece's summons, he sent the sudden news on to the lawyer, justly imagining that he knew more of Kirton's affairs than any one else, and probably would have to settle them.

Mr. Goldsmith reached Kirton's Farm nearly as soon as the Wrenshaws did, and very speedily announced to them that he was appointed Hester's

sole guardian, and that until she was of age she was to reside with him and with his sisters, and, he was very sorry to add, on no account to be allowed to visit any of her relatives. Mr. Wrenshaw looked both surprised and grieved to hear this: but all other feelings were soon merged in the intense surprise with which both he and his wife heard the amount of Kirton's wealth; it seemed fabulous that a man who had lived as he had done, should have amassed such a fortune.

By his will, Hester was to have a yearly income till she came of age, subject to Mr. Goldsmith's regulation, and although, in the event of her marriage, the property was settled unreservedly on herself and any children she might have, still she was advised in all matters to be guided by him. It seemed to Goldsmith's practised eye, when he examined the papers in the study, that his old friend had been seized by death in the act of adding some codicil to his will, although there was nothing beyond the heading of the sheet of paper before him on the desk to support such a conjecture. .

For a man who had so doubted mankind, his trust in Goldsmith appeared remarkable; the best

solution to it lay in the good opinion Kirton had held of the strength of his own constitution, spite of the warnings he had had frequently of late. He was persuaded that the strange feeling about his heart arose from indigestion, and that he should outlive all his contemporaries, very likely those younger, including Hester herself. It may seem an unusual feeling for a father to have had with regard to a child; but Kirton never felt so little affection for Hester as when he looked upon her as the destined heir of his dearly cherished unknown riches; he almost hated her then; it was far pleasanter to contemplate himself as her probable survivor.

Mr. Goldsmith was civil and urbane to Hester's uncle and aunt—begged them to take their own time about remaining—to make themselves perfectly at home; but it was so evident that he was, and considered himself, master there, that, spite of her unwillingness to leave poor Hester, Mrs. Wrenshaw, after a few days, consented to her husband's wish that they should return home.

“And do you remark,” said the irate old gentleman, when they were seated in the fly which was

to convey them to the station—for Mrs. Frank Wrenshaw and Lucy were still with them, and were keeping house in their absence, so they had no excuse for remaining at Stedding—"that the smooth-tongued old Jew of a fellow never once asked us to go and see Hester when she lives in London? But I shall go, I can tell him; I shall just make sure the child's properly treated."

But things happened adversely.

When the Wrenshaws returned to town they found Mrs. Frank bent on taking Lucy to Paris, and they were easily persuaded to accompany them. Jacob Bonham came over and fetched the two Stedding ladies home again; but Mr. Wrenshaw was so delighted with all he saw in Paris that he persuaded his wife to winter there—Jacob Bonham having undertaken that a friend of his should occupy the Wrenshaws' London house during their absence.

Mrs. Wrenshaw's heart ached to think of Hester left alone among strangers; but her husband said he believed she would get on better with the Goldsmiths, if she were left alone with them at first, especially as that clause in her father's will had forbidden intercourse with her relations.

But Hester was not destined to have much acquaintance with the Miss Goldsmiths.

She begged so hard to stay at Kirton's Farm, that Goldsmith consented she should remain there for a few weeks. It need scarcely be said that Mr. Hallam soon made his appearance, at first apparently to help Mr. Goldsmith, but soon as a friend of Hester's.

When next it was proposed that she should take up her abode in the lawyer's house in Regent's Park, she consented without reluctance. The dulness and restraint were far more irksome than anything she had felt at Kirton's Farm, but all was forgotten in the sunlight of Hallam's presence. He was a tolerably attentive lover, and she had very soon promised to be his wife, and then he persuaded her that the education she so longed for would progress far more speedily on the Continent than in England, and that by waiting till the year of her mourning was fulfilled, she would be losing valuable time; in short, his eloquence was irresistible. Hester had felt aggrieved with her aunts, and with Lucy, for going abroad just when she had needed their sympathy; and Mr. Goldsmith took good care that she should

not hear from them; so that after sending two letters to Lucy, which never reached their destination, as Goldsmith led her to believe her cousin was still abroad, Hester gave up writing in proud resentment at their unkindness and neglect.

So the first news her relations heard of Hester, was that sent by her at a venture to her cousin Lucy, at Stedding. She was to marry Mr. Frederic Hallam in a fortnight, and would wish her cousin to be her bridesmaid; but as Mrs. Wrenshaw was not asked to accompany her daughter, and the letter was very formal and cold, she refused to allow Lucy to go. She thought a child's wedding, so soon after her father's death—hardly three months—most indecorous and improper; and Lucy was so busy just then in preparing for her own marriage, that she scarcely regretted her mother's prohibition to attend Hester's, although, as she said, it seemed sad for the poor girl to be married among strangers. But Jacob did not leave her much leisure to think of other people; he was always in Duke Street, and at last Mrs. Frank Wrenshaw wrote to her brother and sister in Paris that she really thought they had better make haste and come over, as Mr. Bonham seemed

in a hurry to be married, and so far as his patients were concerned, she thought it would be a good thing over, for he neglected them sadly, and she was sure somebody would be poisoned some day, with a wrong dose of physic.

So that, although Hester received congratulatory letters from all her friends, she did not see any of them before she went to Italy with her husband; and although Mr. and Mrs. Wrenshaw felt anxious about the husband she had chosen, they were so full of Lucy and her happiness, that their thoughts were naturally diverted from a niece who appeared to care so little to keep up any intercourse with them.

It was a relief to learn from Lucy, that Mr. Hallam was an old acquaintance, one who had loved Hester before she was known to be an heiress. She did not think it necessary to mention his letter to her, and it comforted her uncle and aunt greatly, that she had not fallen a prey to some designing fortune-hunter.

Mr. Wrenshaw was not a man who listened to evil reports, and he told his wife that although he had a personal dislike to Goldsmith, from his Jewish appearance and oily ways, he believed him to be a respectable man, and his sisters good reli-

gious women. In her own mind Mrs. Wrenshaw doubted, from what she heard of them, whether these ladies would influence Hester for good. She had not been brought up to think much of religion, and good as the Miss Goldsmiths really were, and beneficial, doubtless, as their doctrines were to themselves, her aunt felt almost sure that she would dislike to have all daily talk salted with texts, and to have tracts and "words in season" crammed into her pockets and her ears on every occasion.

And Mrs. Wrenshaw was right. Spite of her unimaginative practical mind, Hester had a keen admiration of the beautiful; it was not essential to her happiness, as it would have been had she been gifted with a more vivid fancy, or more intense powers of enjoyment. Still the aspect of the two Miss Goldsmiths was so repelling as almost to disgust her on her first introduction to them; they abjured all vanities; among others, that of wearing any cap or head-dress; but even then, as Hester thought, they might have braided their hair smoothly, instead of wearing it in rough untidy curls, which looked as if a hungry dog had been trying to make his dinner off them. They were

kind, but they looked shocked and distressed when they found that she was ignorant of all that they considered indispensable. Unfortunately, they had a talent for preaching in chorus, and as each tried to be heard, she waxed more and more dogmatic, till they enlisted Hester's obstinacy against them; and when once she had made up her mind they were wrong, they might go on talking for ever. She could sit there in silence certainly, but deaf to all that was being said on each side of her.

She found ready sympathy in Mr. Hallam, who used to turn "the old prigs," as he called them, and their opinions, into far greater ridicule than Hester would have dreamed of—for she shrank from laughing at holy things as much as she did from hearing them made the subject of common talk. With all her self-will, there was reverence in her nature, as there is in all deep natures, and it had safe shyness about a careless handling of sacred words and things. But as yet the shyness went much too far: religion was to her an abstract quality, detached from daily life altogether; she meant to be religious some day, when she grew older, and should understand more about it; but there it stopped, and she was quite

sure she could never take to such a religion as the Miss Goldsmiths'.

Poor, good women! how little they knew the harm they were doing; for, naturally as Hester talked about them to Hallam, she found it impossible not to laugh at his ridicule of them, and, by degrees, she joined him; he must be right in all he said and did, he was so sweet-tempered, so generous, so much better than she was; he was religious enough for a young man; and thus, gradually, the awful feelings about death and a future state, which her father's sudden death had stirred in her heart, faded away as this world and its delights became each day more real and dear to her.

As women are, Hester, ~~was~~ just the woman for such a man as Hallam to have married if he had truly loved her. She was not troubled with Lucy's ardent nature, nor was she very exacting of small attentions, but she was watchful and observant and of a jealous disposition, and she soon noticed when he began to leave her more and more to herself; though it cut her to the heart, she loved him too much to resent it; she felt her ignorance and awkward ways annoyed

him, and studied harder than ever to improve herself. Her pride, too, prevented her from being troublesome. When they were abroad, he always told her that the museums and picture-galleries she so much wished to visit would give her no pleasure until she was better versed in the associations connected with them, and he seemed to be afraid when there, that she would say or do something to betray her ignorance.

Hester was always humble on this point: she was too real not to acknowledge the great difference of education between herself and her husband. Sometimes his decisions surprised her; she thought that she should have acted differently under such circumstances, but these were only thoughts, they never took the shape of suggestions. And fortunately for her that they did not; for, with all his good temper, Frederic Hallam was the last man who would have brooked interference with his opinions. She used to think at first that these ideas of hers resulted from ignorance; but as her intellect developed each day more rapidly, as it brightened more and more from the rust its long idleness had accumulated, her judgment became also more acute and defined,

and she felt that in some way or other her husband's affection had become alienated from her.

He had made so many protestations of his love at the time of their engagement, that although she had always secretly wished for more assurances after marriage, she had told herself she ought to be satisfied, trying to feel persuaded that, when she was more his equal, he would think better of her; and sometimes she thought this longing for greater love was what she had heard called romantic when she was at school—for Hester seldom read novels.

But, since her return to London, she had not been nearly so happy. She had received two letters from Lucy, and the description of her happiness was so intense, so glowing, that it made her cousin's heart ache.

She gave one of the letters to Frederic to read, but, after getting through the first page, he had laughed and said it smelt so strongly of bread and butter he could not stand it.

Hester looked up surprised.

"I mean, it reads school-girlish, a sort of got-up thing; I'm quite sure you'd have too much sense to write such romantic nonsense."

He did not look at Hester as he said this, or

her sorrowful expression would surely not have escaped him. She was thinking how different must be her description of her husband's love for her, for Lucy's letter was all Jacob and his love, from beginning to end.

On the morning after Captain Fortescue's visit, Hester heard again from her cousin; she did not offer her husband this letter to read—he was deep in his favourite *Bell's Life*. However, he listened when she spoke to him.

"Frederic, do you know that Lucy—of course, I mean Mr. Bonham, too—wishes us to go and spend a few days with them soon?"

"Quite impossible, my dear, as far as I'm concerned, at present."

"Ah, but there is no need to answer directly, as she says she shall send a proper invitation when they are ready for us."

"It would be a great pity to ask us before," said Hallam, laughing; "but, Hester, I want you to go out with me this morning."

Her face was radiant in an instant, and without any of her usual calm restraint, she went up to him and kissed him.

"There," he said, patting her on the shoulder,

still good-humouredly, but with much of the action with which we check the over-fondness of an affectionate spaniel, "sit down on the sofa, like a good girl, and I'll tell you all about it. Oh, stop, just let me see what this is," as a paragraph at the end of the column next the one he had been reading, caught his eye.

Hester pressed her lips together: she looked strangely like her father at this moment; but Hallam had finished his paragraph, and went on speaking.

"Look here; I want to take you to call on my mother; there now, don't look frightened, because you needn't be a bit. I thought you managed famously yesterday. I've not said we're going, and so she won't be expecting us. I hate all ridiculous fusses, and so do you, I know. Put on a nice dress, that's all, and your last new bonnet; you look best in that."

Hester did not answer; she stood beside him, thinking.

"Why, what's the matter, child? don't you want to go?" he said, impatiently.

"You said a week ago, Fred, that you did not mean to let your mother see me at present. You

should wait till we had a house of our own. I thought, from what you said, she would not perhaps care to see me yet. I should not like to go, unless she is willing I should do so."

"Now, don't be silly, Hester, like other women, and take up a prejudice against your mother-in-law, just because she is your mother-in-law. You must like my mother, you cannot help it, she is so fond of me."

"I will try," said Hester, with a bright smile at his last words, and she went to change her dress.

She shrank from the idea of this visit with more than her accustomed shyness. Supposing—and this was sure to be case—that Frederic's mother thought her quite unworthy of him—her idol. It was one thing to think this herself, and quite another to bear it from another person.

She stood before her looking-glass, puzzled by the new and strange feelings that rose within her, and yet they were more strange than new. The defiant, haughty spirit, which had formerly broken out in rare but, when it did show itself, intense rebellion to her father's will, now asserted

itself, and made her believe, against all her best efforts, that it would be impossible for her to conciliate her husband's mother, or appear to any advantage before her. It is, perhaps, the most unlucky foreboding that can possess any woman, because it is sure to come true. Vanity has probably something to do with it, but not all: there is a worthier emotion mingled, when, as in Hester's case, there is the consciousness that the best and noblest feelings have been rudely checked; that when the heart was full of frank, generous love, which, if it had been as freely received and transplanted into a kindred soil, would have taken ineradicable hold there, it has, on the contrary, been choked by the cold indifference thrown on it; even if it has escaped the more sudden withering of dislike and contempt.

A withering, not like that of autumn leaves, for this knows no spring of renewed growth; it is not sullenness, it is not pride; a very warm, loving disposition, meek as well as gentle-willed, may sometimes succeed in overcoming the shrinking human nature has from offering again what has been once unkindly rejected, and be beloved at last in

return; but even then, there will never be the confidence, the same power of spreading out the treasures of one's heart in the sunshine of a truly appreciating affection; there will always be a certain amount of timid mistrust. If mothers-in-law would ponder this, and take their sons' wives to their hearts at once, not expecting to find them faultless, but fondly accepting them, faults and all, as now and for ever the same flesh and blood as their husbands, their equals in all things so far as man and woman can be equals; how much future sorrow they would many of them spare themselves. How truly would they gain for ever two children, instead of losing one, for if a man loves a woman as he ought to love his wife, his future affection for his mother is mainly influenced by her conduct to her daughter-in-law at the outset.

And Mrs. Hallam's had been very unkind. She knew nothing of the real objections to her son's marriage—that his heart was not interested, although this probably she would have said mattered little, provided the match was a good one—good, standing for rich in her vocabulary—and suitable in other ways; nor did she know from personal observation, that Hester was ignorant

and unformed in manner ; but she was so excessively angry and annoyed to find that her son had actually engaged himself to a girl whom she had never seen, and whose family and connections were not to be talked about, that she refused to be present at the marriage.

The story she had told to Fortescue about Hester was partly imaginary, partly from the gossip of a mutual friend, who had called on Mr. Goldsmith during the engagement, and had been introduced to Hester.

In his heart Frederic Hallam was just as well pleased that Hester should have a little time for improvement and softening down before his mother saw her ; but still he resented the refusal, and thought it in very bad taste. He invited his aunt ; she was far more cordial, although she reproached him with his mysterious ways ; she said she should like to see Miss Kirton very much if Fred would bring her to call, but she could not become acquainted with the Miss Goldsmiths, and this must happen if she called in Regent's Park, or attended the wedding.

Hallam was not sorry, but he affected to be huffed in the note he wrote in answer, and said

he could not now introduce her to her niece till their return to London.

He had no fear about his aunt becoming reconciled; she was not thoroughly selfish, and if he seemed happy as a married man, he thought she would be sure to behave well to Hester.

The notion that there were two sides to the question—that Hester might not choose to be tolerated and patronized—had never once occurred to him.

At her own request, she had written to her mother-in-law soon after her marriage; she had so longed all her life for a mother, that she was resolved not to give up the chance of winning Mrs. Hallam's affection without an effort; the letter was plain, straight-forward, and sensible—like all Hester did or said—but the handwriting was cramped and the wording {ungraceful; her husband offered to compose a letter for her, but her thorough honesty came in the way of her desire to please, and gained the day.

A large-hearted woman would have prized and fostered such an overture, but there was nothing large about Mrs. Hallam senior, mentally or morally; she pronounced the letter ill-bred and

presuming, and never replied to it, except by commenting on it to her son, imagining or pretending to imagine him ignorant of it: she apparently forgot how much more really ill-bred this was than poor Hester's letter.

Hester was by no means gentle-willed, and when she had said she would try to like her mother-in-law, she knew she could make no spontaneous advances; once repelled, hers was not a nature ever to risk a second rebuff; now she wished anything would happen to prevent this dreaded meeting; she felt as hard as a stone.

"But after all," she thought, "it is better over; after the first I shall not care about it, and it will be so delightful to have a long walk with Fred."

Her eyes fell on the looking-glass, and she smiled with pleasure that she looked so well that morning, just when Fred could not help looking at her as they walked together. She had never thought herself handsome till he had taught her to do so, and now she valued her beauty, not as some women do, to be displayed to the utmost possible extent to all beholders, but as something belonging to her husband, a treasure that she must be careful of, because it was his.

After she was dressed she stood a few moments thinking of Fred; how wonderful his love for her must have been, that not even her ignorance nor her poverty-stricken appearance had checked its ardour. She ought never to be dissatisfied with him or his ways, when she thought of the immense sacrifice he had made in marrying her; what a true proof of his love he had given in that, whereas she had nothing but gain on her side.

At any rate she could and would try to-day not to say anything about her former domestic life, and so offend him as she had done the previous evening.

She was rather disappointed to find they were not to walk. Her husband had sent for a carriage while she was up-stairs; he had told her she should have one of her own soon; but the longer he stayed in London, the more certain he was that they could not manage with their present income; therefore, any large extra expense would be imprudent, until Goldsmith became more reasonable; besides, he really meant to buy Hester a horse out of his anticipated winnings at the races, and one for Martin. He had one of his

own, of course, a man could not get along without a horse; but she would soon have hers now, and then she would be independent.

He was very silent during their drive; he had rarely been so long without seeing his mother, and, although the tone of her yesterday's note had not pleased him, he felt a natural yearning to be friends with her again.

The drawing-room was empty when they were ushered into it. Hester looked perfectly calm and self-possessed, but she could not see anything distinctly at first, so great was her inward agitation.

I do not suppose, to a timid person, there is any mental agony to equal a visit of this kind, to one you are anxious to stand well with, and who, you feel more than half sure, has prejudged you unfavourably; but, to a woman, if there be any depth in her character, it seldom occurs without working a change. The intense mental effort at self-control hardens the whole nature, the will especially; it may be a strengthening—it is not a beneficial process.

Her husband looked kindly at her, and pointed out some water-colour sketches and likenesses,

dispersed about the rooms—she could not see anything clearly ; her sight seemed dim, and her senses confused.

A moment more — the door opened, and rustling silk entered. She saw her husband spring forward to meet a lady, who threw her arms round him and kissed him with elaborate tenderness ; then they both came towards her. Her husband took her hand, pride was forgotten, and she looked up in his mother's face, with a timid, imploring look ; she could not help feeling daughter-like, spite of the rebuff she had received.

She saw a pretty, silly face, trying to look imposing and dignified ; and as Hester leant forward for a mother's kiss, Mrs. Hallam just touched her forehead with her lips, saying as she did so,—

“ I hope you will make my son happy.”

There was perhaps nothing in the words to give offence, and yet they checked Hester's good resolutions completely, and froze the warm, rising feeling. They were words not spoken impulsively, but sounded as though got up for the occasion. Much as she loved her husband, it seemed to Hester that happiness ought not to be one-sided in marriage ;

that it was his duty to make her happy, too. Perhaps this is often the corner-stone of mischief between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law; they show plainly a doubt whether the young wives will make their sons happy—whether they are, in fact, good enough for them; *ces choses se pensent*: probably all good, loving wives will own themselves inferior to, and undeserving of, their husbands; but then as long as we are subject to human infirmity, it is one thing to confess, another to be accused. In all human relations, the secret of dislikes and disagreements is, that we all forget Adam's fall, and judge each other as angelic, not as human beings. It was plain to Hester that her husband's mother did not look on her as a daughter.

And then they all sate down, and there was a pause.

"I got your note yesterday, mother," said Hallam, "so I thought we would come over early, and be sure to find you in. What are you going to do with yourself to-day?"

He had settled in his own mind that he should leave Hester in Wilton Place; his mother could easily take or send her home; it would be a good

opportunity for them to see a little of each other, but her answer disarranged his plans.

"I have friends coming to luncheon," said Mrs. Hallam, "and we are all going to the flower-show afterwards."

"By Jove! I quite forgot the *fête*. I say, Hester, you'd like to go, wouldn't you?" he said, after a pause; "who are the people going with you, mother?"

"Lady Hilsdeen and that elegant girl of hers: you must remember her, surely, Frederic, and we are to meet Sir John and Lady Fletcher at the gardens."

"Well, then, you'll just have room for one; I wish you'd chaperone Hester. She has not been anywhere yet, and I'm sure her bonnet will do. Let me look at you, child; she only wants a gayer parasol and gloves, to be all right; but I'll choose those for her in some shop or other, and send them here as I go back; she'll do then, won't she?" he added, seeing how disturbed his mother looked.

"My dear, I was not thinking about your wife's dress," said his mother, in a voice with a good deal of reproach in it. "I should be very glad to be of service to her in any way, and if you

could accompany us it would do very well, but already we shall be four ladies to one gentleman, and ——”

Hester had walked up to her husband; she felt too much annoyed to be any longer timid.

“Fred, I would rather go home with you : I do not care for this flower-show.”

It was said in the old, hard, abrupt way he had scarcely noticed in her since their marriage, and Frederic Hallam started. What would his mother think ?

“Still,” continued Mrs. Hallam, as if there had been no interruption, although she had also started at the determined voice, “if you cannot go, Frederic, I will take care of your wife, if you particularly wish it.”

There was a grandeur of benevolence in her face as she spoke, from which even a meeker spirit than Hester’s might have shrunk.

“No, thank you,” she said, looking straight before her in the awkward, dogged way in which shy people often offend, forgetting how a smile in the face of the person addressed will smooth away the hardness of words; “I will not be a trouble to you, and I had rather not go without Frederic.”

Mrs. Hallam smiled in a superior and pitying manner. Hallam would have remonstrated with his wife, but this smile stopped him. He put a strong restraint on himself, and walked to the window, and looked into the street for a minute. However annoyed he might feel just then, his mother should not see it.

"Well, then, Hester," he said, "we won't hinder my mother: perhaps it's as well you don't go. When will you come and see us, mother?" he said to Mrs. Hallam.

"You must dine with me first, you know," she said. "Come one day soon, and I will ask your aunt Mattha to meet you."

When this was settled, they parted, and this time Mrs. Hallam withheld her glacial kiss, nor did Hester make any movement to show she expected it.

CHAPTER IV.

LUCY'S LECTURE.

MR., or, as he was called by the country people, Dr. Bonham (a distinction, by the way, which he might have attained easily enough had he cared about it) lived in a comfortable, old-fashioned, red-brick house in the best part of the High Street, Stedding—one of those quaint, peculiarly English-looking houses, suggestive of Christmas cheer, and every other sort of national geniality. It had a stone cornice and quoins, and a carved semicircular door-heading, which, projecting from the face of the wall, and being also deeply recessed, looked like a huge camar shell, and made a snug resting-place for the chrysalides of garden whites and other adventurous butterflies, hidden by the deep mass of shadow in which it lay—a shadow which struck the eye vividly when the

full blaze of sunshine fell on the outward semi-circular moulding—a shadow into which one longed to creep for cool refreshment in real midsummer weather.

The door-stone was raised two steps above the level of the street, but then you stepped down again into the hall, looking like a great chess-board with its squares of black and white marble; a ponderous brass knocker glistened in the centre of the door, requiring some strength of wrist to raise it. On either side the hall was a handsome square room—one the dining-room, the other, on the right, Jacob had had divided, and kept one-half nearest the hall for his library and writing-room, and the other for his surgery, with a separate street entrance.

The staircase on the right side of the hall was broad and easy-going, of dark oak, uncarpeted and very slippery, one short flight sweeping half round at the top, and leading by a broad passage to a square landing hung with engravings and photographs. Opening from this was the drawing-room, a pretty, tasteful place, with nothing handsome or costly about it, but so arranged as to set everything in the room in the best possible light.

All strangers who entered the room for the first time remarked with surprise that, although the hall and front rooms were almost on a level with the street, from the drawing-room windows, which opened to the ground, you stepped easily on to the lawn, sloping for some distance in the midst of the pretty garden. The truth was that the garden was raised artificially till it met the rising ground beyond, and thus the flowers in it had the advantage of a far purer atmosphere than would have been the case, had it been below instead of on a level with the chimneys of the lower part of the town. As yet, flowers were scarce, but bushes of red and white lilac, long ringlets of golden laburnum, and the snowy masses of gueldres rose looked lovely in the spring sunshine. These were in the shrubberies on either side, but on the lawn itself in the distance stood a red and a white hawthorn, and nearer the windows a standard double-blossomed cherry-tree covered with its exquisite flowers.

But pretty as the garden view was from the drawing-room, Lucy seldom sate there. Her favourite place of occupation was her husband's study, and here on this May morning she was

sitting diligently working at a shapeless piece of French cambric, on part of which she was sewing some delicate lace. Jacob stood leaning on the mantel-piece gazing admiringly at her and her work, and, I am sorry to say, doing nothing else. She did not raise her eyes, but sat there apparently unconscious of his presence for a few minutes, only with a graver face than usual.

"What makes you so silent, my pet?" he said at last, tired of waiting for her to look up; for he believed in the soft spell which forces the person you love to meet your eye if you only look lovingly and long enough; he had found it always so true with Lucy, hitherto, that he thought she must have some reason for not looking up. They had been married four months, but their honeymoon was not nearly ended yet. To some husbands and wives, life itself is one enduring honeymoon, which outward trials cannot embitter. Lucy looked at him now, but there was a shade of sadness in her beautiful eyes.

"Why, I have been thinking for several days past that I have been wrong, Jacob."

"Wrong! you are never wrong, you know; let us hear this wonderful secret."

"I don't like to tell you, and yet I must, dearest." She threw her work on the table, and going up to her husband, put both her arms round him, and leant her head against him. "I have been wrong in thinking you were so, and not telling you of it." She just glanced up, and seeing his colour rise, she went on quickly: "Don't be vexed, darling, now I have said so much I must go on. I think you ought to go your daily round earlier; for if you started at nine instead of eleven, you would be back sooner for dinner, and then you could start again earlier in the afternoon, and all those poor people who come for their medicine in the evening, need not be kept waiting; that boy in the surgery never begins anything till you come back, I believe."

"I did not think you would have tired of me so soon, Lucy," he said, reproachfully, holding himself straight upright, so as not in any way to return her caress; for the time he felt quite hardened against her.

"Oh, Jacob! now if you are going to be naughty, the very first time I find fault with you the least bit, I've done; but it seemed to me dishonest to be thinking this of you, and not to say it."

"Which comes to this," he said, disengaging himself and walking away from her, thoroughly vexed, "that you consider it necessary to teach me how to manage my business; many a wife would rejoice in a husband who loved her so much, that he could not bear to leave her; but I suppose you have taken it into your head, it is idleness."

He was turning to leave the room. Poor Lucy had begun to cry quietly at these first unkind words from her husband, but she looked up again now.

"You are really angry with me, Jacob, and perhaps I spoke in a foolish hasty way; but indeed, indeed, I would like to keep you here all day, if I did not think it wrong;" then seeing that he was still going away, she darted forward and caught his arm. "Jacob, you are not going without saying you forgive me—suppose anything happened while we were apart to either of us—oh, you darling, you could not, could you?"

Jacob bent down and kissed her, but not heartily; his pride had received a deep wound. It cannot be denied, he had rather a sulky temper if interfered with, although generally he was very forbearing. She came to the door, as she

always did when the gig was brought round, and her heart seemed to be trying to leap out through her eyes in the farewell glances she gave him, but she saw he was angry with her still.

And yet Lucy was right. Jacob had been sadly neglecting his business ever since his marriage. Every week he got more lax, and both visits and medicine had fallen sadly into arrears. Lucy saw all this, and her remarkable quickness fully appreciated what the results might be; her vivid imagination already painted a rival doctor stepping into Jacob's practice, and besides all this, for Lucy was not mercenary, it seemed to her that work of one kind or another was what mankind was sent on earth to do, and *that* work was safest and best which belonged to our lawful calling; enjoyment and relaxation were good slaves, but evil masters. Apart from this, Lucy's fears would have been justifiable, had they been influenced by pecuniary reasons. The greater part of his father's money Jacob had expended in the purchase of the practice, and of the house and grounds they now occupied. They were living with the utmost prudence and economy, with only one maid-servant, Jacob of course having to keep a groom; but

before very long, there would be fresh expenses, and another servant must be kept. Lucy did not calculate all this; it was not in her nature to anticipate evil; but she felt strongly that her husband was not doing his duty, and she had worked herself up to the belief that she ought to tell him so.

Perhaps she might have been less abrupt, but there are men—and among the best living—who are always slightly irritated when first told of their faults; so perhaps the way of doing it does not much matter, so long as it is a loving way.

Lucy felt more unhappy than she had done since her marriage; she was vexed with Jacob and disappointed in him, too. She had learned to consider him perfect, and now her idol was flawed; but this mood soon changed, and she felt she had been to blame for her idol worship. Must he not be human, and beset with infirmities like other human beings? Lucy had had the benefit of her aunt Wrenshaw's occasional teaching while she was at her London school; a greater aid to her married happiness than she was probably aware of. And now she was able to put this teaching to a practical use, ~~and~~ with her warm temperament

and love of romantic reading, she would probably have expected her husband to be on all occasions as faultless a paragon of manhood, as King Arthur himself. When one looks some years back, one wonders how the young women who smiled and wept over the perfections of Sir Charles Grandison, Thaddeus of Warsaw, and Lord Orville, could have ever reconciled themselves to human husbands at all. But as language-masters tell us we can only acquire correct pronunciation from having it taught us in a slightly exaggerated manner, perhaps even the *tête exaltée* expectations these types of husbands created were preferable to the matter-of-fact, too practical views of girls now-a-days. Romance, at any rate, cannot be laid to their charge; the great fear is, that as the demand for chivalry becomes extinguished, the virtue itself will also become extinct in England, as it has long ago in France.

Lucy grew more and more vexed with herself, as she remembered how beautifully Jacob had read the "Miller's Daughter" to her that very morning—he had certainly stayed at home an hour after that—but what right had she to keep guard over her husband, and measure out his time for him?

She was getting quite spoiled, and should soon be what she held in horror, a "set-you-to-rights," strong-minded woman. She cried a little more, and then went on with her needlework, quite oblivious of all the sage reasons by which she had persuaded herself into scolding her husband, as she called it, and resolving to have it comfortably out with him as soon as he returned.

She had lost all traces of tears by the time her mother looked in to pay her daily visit. There was a troubled look on Mrs. Wrenshaw's comely face, that instantly roused Lucy's attention.

"What is the matter, mamma? you look as if something had happened."

"Well, my dear,"—Mrs. Wrenshaw untied her bonnet strings and threw them wide apart, a favourite habit when heated with walking—"it's this alarm about vaccination really quite flusters me."

"You mean about small-pox," said Lucy; "Jacob is vexed with you because you won't be vaccinated; he says it's selfish of any one who has not had the disease not to undergo vaccination."

"Well, I know," poor Mrs. Wrenshaw looked greatly perplexed; "he told me as much last Sunday; but then, as Jemima Skipper says, it's one

thing to be done from the cow direct, and another from these babies. She says—and she's clever, you know, Lucy—don't you remember those little blue paper books she wrote—that these babies are all worn out, and they may fill us full of all sorts of horrors. No, I can't, and you may tell Jacob; I'll have nothing worn-out vaccinated into me; nothing but a good healthy cow."

Lucy laughed, and assured her mother that if she would change her mind, Jacob would undertake to find a nice healthy baby.

But she only shook her head, and declared her intention of abiding by Jemima's opinion, and then she examined and admired Lucy's needlework.

"Oh! by-the-by," she said suddenly, as she sat pinching up the lace round the little sleeves between her thumb and finger, to make it lie flat, "I knew I had something to tell you: old Biz came to see me yesterday; she goes on against your poor uncle Kirton worse than ever."

"I'm very sorry," said Lucy, "because I'm afraid she'll get a habit of doing it, even when she sees Hester."

"Well, I don't know if it's fair to blame her, I'm sure; but it does seem hard, when she'd served

him faithfully for thirteen years, and really, poor old soul, did try to make the best of things, that he should have left her a paltry five pounds."

"He probably expected that Hester would do as she has done. Jacob says she ought to be very comfortable all her life on such an allowance."

"Not a bit of it, my dear; Biz knew all about the will, as every one else did. Why, it was town-talk, child, and every one's impression was, that your uncle expected to outlive both Hester and that Goldfinch. I don't wonder at the old creature being rusty about it; though I'll own it's bad taste to be always speaking against the dead. It makes one shiver to think what she may say of one, when one's in one's coffin."

"Well, but, mamma dear, it won't much matter what Biz says of any one; she's known to be cross and crabbed."

"Lucy, my dear, I'm surprised at you; it must always matter a great deal what every one says of us; why, we might as well all be Mrs. Jones at once."

"Poor Mrs. Jones! do you know, Jacob says, she is a very nice woman, and that if people avoided her less, she would be less eccentric?"

“ Ah ! pack o’ nonsense ! I’ve no patience with Jacob, he’s just like all the men ; if a woman’s got a pretty face, or even a clever tongue—for Mrs. Jones is none so pretty—she may do what she pleases. I don’t hold with widows, and I never did, as you know, Lucy ; one of the things I felt in losing your poor dear father, was that it left me a widow, and I should grow foolish like the rest of ’em. But really, Lucy, don’t you have anything to say to Mrs. Jones—things are getting serious in that quarter.”

“ Why, has she been giving away any more dinners ? ”

“ I don’t know anything about dinners,” said Mrs. Wrenshaw, looking very virtuous and incredulous.

“ Oh, yes, mamma, only you’ve forgotten—one of her greatest crimes in the eyes of the Miss Skippers was because she was seen at dinner-time going out with a bason covered with a cloth ; they said, you know, she ought to have waited till it grew dark, and yet Jacob told me that the poor girl she visited would have sunk after her illness, but for Mrs. Jones’s kitchen-physic.”

“ Jacob ! ”—but seeing a decidedly annoyed look

on Lucy's face at this second slighting mention of her husband, she went on:—"Well, I was going to tell you something I've heard to-day. Last night, it must have been late, for it was quite dusk, as Jemima was sitting at the window——"

"Looking after other people's business instead of her own, as usual," said Lucy, who detested gossip, and wished her mother would talk something else.

"Now, Lucy, don't be so ill-natured; ever since you've been married, you've never a good word for my friend Jemima. I can't think how it is, but single women and young brides seem as if they couldn't abide each other. However, as I was saying, Jemima was sitting at the window; Jemima sits at the window, she says, because since they've given up cards, they never light candles till it's quite dark, and she has such an active mind, she can't bear to sit dreaming and doing nothing but think, as her sisters do. Well, there she was sitting last night, when she saw a tall young man—she's quite sure he was a stranger—go and knock at Mrs. Jones's door, and who should come down to open it but Mrs. Jones

herself: it was getting so dusk she could not have told who it was, only luckily Mrs. Jones had a candle in her hand. The man darted in, in a quick, mysterious way, and, my dear, he stayed there a long while, and when he went away, Mrs. Jones let him out at the door herself. It was very strange, wasn't it? Now, you know, of course, as Jemima says, he might be a brother or a relation of some kind, but those sort of things don't look well: to say the least of it, they make people talk—My dear, what's the matter?"

Lucy had started up, her face scarlet with indignation.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, this is too much. The Miss Skippers will get into trouble, if they don't take care."

Mrs. Wrenshaw looked confounded; she was not so quick-witted as her daughter, but she was not dull, either.

"The person," went on Lucy, her lip quivering with the scorn she felt for Miss Jemima Skipper, "who called on Mrs. Jones last night, was Jacob; her maid, Mary, had been suddenly seized with epilepsy, and she got Carter, the chemist's boy, to run for Jacob. It was some time before he

thought her well enough to be left, and then, dear, kind fellow, he went and got old Mrs. Cooper, the charwoman, to sleep in the house, for, he said, although Mrs. Jones behaved admirably, he saw she was terribly frightened."

"Well, now, to be sure," said Mrs. Wrenshaw; "but, Lucy, my dear, you don't suppose Jemima would have said such a thing if she had not felt sure herself; you see, it was all from its being so dusk, but I'll go and tell her at once."

"Yes," said Lucy, "or she'll go telling some one else, and, dearest mother," she added, putting her arm round her neck and kissing her, "don't think I dislike Jemima; she's your friend, so how could I? I only wish she would try to believe, what I am sure is true, that we always see the worst half of good people; we don't know anything about the little conflicts and struggles that go on inside them. I wish *you* would call on Mrs. Jones, mamma; you'd do her good, and then if you were her friend, you could advise her about those little follies in dress and other things which annoy you."

Mrs. Wrenshaw made no promises, and she also offered no remonstrance; but Miss Jemima

was utterly aghast at the warmth with which her friend espoused the pretty widow's cause, and also at the serious way in which she said that people ought to be sure beyond a doubt before they repeated anything against their neighbours.

"You see, my dear Jemima," said the comely dame; the excitement, and the flush it had brought, made her look quite handsome; "I'm a widow myself, so I have a fellow-feeling for 'em; maybe, there'll be some scandal about me next."

Lucy wished to be alone, to greet Jacob on his return, so she had not pressed her mother to spend the rest of the day, as she usually did when her husband was going his long country round, and would not return till evening.

It was the longest day she had ever known.

What a remarkable change love—such love as Lucy's for her husband—effects in a woman's whole nature. She had no longer a separate existence; nothing interested or pleased sufficiently to arrest attention, unless shared with Jacob in the same way. No mere personal grief, or suffering, or disappointment, touched her as it did before her life was bound up in his; but anything, however trifling, that related to him, even her mother's

depreciatory words that morning, grieved and wounded her. Her very liveliness and amusing talk, one of her most distinguishing characteristics when with others, seemed almost to have deserted her now, except in her husband's presence. He was her soul—her inspiration, as she often told him. She felt stiff, and hard, and unlike herself when without him.

People say that men are often deceived in the women they marry; I do not believe this where there is true love. There is, as no one will deny who has ever felt it, a holy, purifying atmosphere in true Love, which elevates the character and aims of both man and woman; and if we look at marriage in its true light, as a sacrament, we may reasonably hope and believe that the deception, as it is falsely called—or rather the better reality—will continue, and that a faulty woman may be almost an angel in her husband's eyes, simply because she is enabled to be one to him, and no woman striving in the right way will be content or able to subdue her faults towards one person only; they must gradually lessen altogether.

It was six o'clock at last. Jacob always had his dinner on these long days at one of the large

farms on the other side of Stedding, but Lucy knew he would be glad of his tea; how extra careful she was this evening that everything should be exactly as he liked it. There was no looking-glass in the study, and she had already been twice upstairs to see that her hair was in perfect order, and as Jacob liked, when she heard the welcome sound of wheels.

The way in which he met her kiss showed her he was no longer angry with her, but the maid was coming in and out, so she would wait a while before she spoke. Jacob was so silent that it made her nervous; she began to think perhaps reconciliations were foolish things, that it would be better to say nothing, but slip quietly back into the old loving way they had together. Just as she was hesitating she looked up, and met her husband's eyes; they were so sorrowful that she was close to him in an instant.

"You are unhappy about something, darling; what is it?" she said, in her fond petting way.

"I've been unhappy all day," he said. "I was as sulky as a bear this morning, wasn't I, you old pet?"

And then of course Lucy said she had been

most to blame, and after they had settled that, she wondered whether they should ever disagree again, and to her great dismay Jacob said he thought they most probably should, but that, if he could help it, it should not last for more than a minute; he told her that she had been perfectly right in the advice she had given him, at which Lucy felt glad and sorry too, for now she should see less of Jacob than ever, she feared; and yet it must be right for a man to attend to his business.

CHAPTER V.

OUTWITTED.

FREDERIC HALLAM walked to Mr. Goldsmith's office in a very unusual state of mind; he felt decidedly cross and irritable.

He had not taken the slightest notice to Hester of the sort of disagreement that had occurred between her and his mother; it would only make things worse and do no good; he would take very good care they should not meet often, and he should give Hester a caution before she went there to dinner.

But the evident repulsion between his mother and his wife had struck him forcibly, and again he wished that he had not been so hasty about his marriage.

He was not blind to his mother's faults or her silliness, but he loved her at present a great deal better than he loved Hester, and, although his

pride and natural contradiction helped his kind-heartedness in taking his wife's part outwardly, he knew very well that if she and Mrs. Hallam came to open disagreement, his heart would be with his mother.

Frederic Hallam by nature was good-tempered ; of all things he hated what he called "domestic rows ;" the occasional disputes that arose between his mother and his aunt Martha always worried him, and to think that for the rest of his life he was doomed to continual bickering between his mother and his wife made him, for the time, as unhappy as his sanguine temperament could be.

He had not spoken one word to Hester till they reached Gloucester Place, and then, hastily getting out of the cab, he handed her into the house, and, just saying he should be home to dinner, he turned away.

Before he reached Goldsmith's office he had persuaded himself that his forebodings were nonsense : women never agreed at first ; his mother was jealous now, but she would soon grow fond of Hester—that is to say, if Hester behaved herself. When he remembered her awkward abrupt refusal to go to the *fête*, he believed he

had been wrong not to give her a good scolding at once; he could not have told himself why, but at this moment the remembrance of the strange likeness between Hester and her father suddenly seemed to rise before him: the square, well-defined jawbone and compressed lips—for during the visit in Wilton Place he had remarked how tightly she pressed her lips together—and he shivered involuntarily as he thought of his future life.

He remembered this foreboding afterwards.

Mr. Goldsmith was alone and apparently engaged in some profound calculations, but he rose at Hallam's entrance, and, extending both hands, shook his client's heartily, declaring himself, in his thick unctuous voice, delighted to see him.

"I hope my charming ward is quite well, eh?" and then, without any reason, he threw his head back so that his shirt-frill projected like the breast of a Pouter pigeon, and indulged in a long low laugh, which made Hallam in his present mood feel inclined to knock his head against the wall of his own office.

"Oh, yes; she's quite well, thank you; but I say, Goldsmith"—he laid his hat and gloves down

on the table, for his head was aching with the unusual load of thought that had been pressing on it, and, besides, he contemplated a long visit—"why didn't you answer my note?"

"My dear friend"—the lawyer rubbed his white *soignées*-looking hands together, the brilliant on his little finger darting out rays of light in the process, as if it liked it—"I can give you two reasons for my silence: in the first place, I was away, and only returned yesterday; and in the next I felt that I could explain myself better *vivâ voce*."

"Well, what is the explanation? satisfactory, I hope," said Hallam, eagerly.

"My dear friend, what can I say to you? I wish you'd take my advice."

"That's just what I came here for," said the young man, with a forced laugh, "only I want it gilded."

"Ha! ha! ha!" Mr. Goldsmith fell back in his chair for full enjoyment of his friend's joke. "No, really, Mr. Hallam, you grow too sharp for me. What does Mrs. Hallam junior say to these jokes?" Then seeing that Hallam was awaiting his answer with determined impatience, he crossed his legs, and putting his palms together, rested his hands on his knees, and grew serious. "The long

and the short of it is, Mr. Hallam, you'd better take my offer. Let me sink so much—you or your wife shall name the sum—in the purchase of this country place I spoke of. Take my word for it, you'll not only be able to manage with your present income, but you'll save money—positively save money—which I shall be able to turn to account for you, by-and-by."

"There's no use in talking of it, Goldsmith, I'm a Londoner to the back-bone, and you'll never find me burying myself in a country house, among pigs and poultry, where I should grow as slow and narrow-minded as people do who move perpetually in their own little circle."

Mr. Goldsmith was either in a mirthful humour, or he thought laughter the best way of parrying his client's demands, for he relapsed into another of his peculiar attacks, which Hallam bore with greater equanimity; he had had time to recover his coolness, and he well knew that without it he was no match for Goldsmith. Finding the lawyer did not speak, he went on.

"By the terms of Mr. Kirton's will, it appears to me that you could grant us any allowance you please, till my wife is one-and-twenty. It seems

absurd and unreasonable that, in a couple of years' time, we should be suddenly put in possession of a large income, and now have the bare means of existence."

"Large income—bare means of existence! excellent! Pardon me, my dear friend! The truth is"—he went on, after having buried his face in his pocket-handkerchief—"that, even after your wife comes into possession of *her* fortune"—he laid a stress on the pronoun—"it is still actually under my control, for you have only to refer to my dear old friend's will to see that your wife is advised to consult me in all things; and moreover, my dear sir, when first I proposed your present income, you seemed quite satisfied with the sum I named, so that I feel surprised to hear you now term it 'a bare means of existence.' Remember, also, that your wife's money is absolutely settled on herself, when she comes of age."

Mr. Goldsmith was not laughing now, he was almost serious in his earnestness.

"Then you positively refuse to increase it. I want to give Mrs. Hallam a carriage and horses, and a good many other things; I see no way of doing so at present."

"But, my dear sir," said the lawyer, in his oiliest tones, "although, from conscientious scruples, I may refuse to set aside what I know to have been my lamented friend's wish in regard to the amount of your income, I never said *I* should refuse to accommodate you with a small additional sum—from time to time."

Hallam hesitated; something Fortescue had said on the previous evening recurred to him forcibly.

"I had rather borrow money of Goldsmith as a poor man, than as a rich one. Don't have any more of that sort of thing."

"Literally, pay you for the use of my own money," he said, looking the other keenly in the face. "You're getting too sharp for me, Goldsmith."

"I beg your pardon," said Goldsmith, looking puzzled; "I thought we were talking of Mrs. Hallam's property just now."

"That's good! What's Hester's is mine, I take it; we're one now, thanks to your talent for match-making."

There was a petulance in the tone, spite of the young man's smiling face, which roused Goldsmith's curiosity.

"Yes," he said, rubbing his hands slowly together, while the serpent tongues of light seemed to Hallam, who was just estimating the probable worth of the gem, venomed in their sudden darting radiance, "that is one of the things on which I congratulate myself, although the amount of devotion you displayed, my dear friend, before your marriage, and the sudden growth of your love, showed me that there is no such thing really as match-making."

Hallam got up impatiently, and took a couple of turns up and down the office before he could answer; he would have recovered himself, and have been able to reply with his customary nonchalance, but the lawyer, for some reason or other, seemed determined to get at the truth, and he continued, in a soothing, deprecatory voice,—

"Not that I doubt for a moment that, had my charming ward been introduced into society, she would have inspired universal admiration—created, in fact, a perfect furore."

"I wish to Heaven you'd tried, then, before you forced me into marrying her."

"My dear friend! why, it was your own seeking.

Bless me, bless me! is your memory so short? Have you forgotten that little memorandum which bound me, under a penalty, to keep my friend's daughter unmolested by admirers. How could I think anything else but that you were desperately in love?"

"You dare not persist in it, Goldsmith; I was wrong to marry as I did, perhaps. That only concerns myself now; but to you, I made no pretence of wanting anything but Ralph Kirton's money."

The lawyer looked surprised, not at such a revelation—he knew what was coming long before—but that so thorough a man of the world as, for his age, he esteemed Hallam, should have committed himself so deeply. Perhaps, one sure way of detecting the mask so many of us wear, is the flush of surprise that peeps from beneath it at any ingenuous or seemingly uncalled-for avowal.

Hallam saw his mistake almost before the words and their full meaning had been comprehended by Goldsmith. He thought the lawyer's surprise that he did not truly love his wife unfeigned; and as he had conscience enough to feel that he ought

to do so, it seemed like inflicting a double wrong on Hester, that any one else should know it. If there was one thing in the world from which he shrank with a feeling almost of terror, it was that she should ever learn that his first devotion to her had been feigned—how mercenary his motives had been (he did not know how truly this showed his appreciation of her character)—and now he had placed himself in the power of the man who stood in the nearest relation possible to her.

But his principle was never to act on impulse, unless some extraordinary circumstance made it justifiable, and he resolved to think over the matter before he put such a dangerous weapon against himself into the lawyer's hand, as he should do by asking him to hold his tongue. He began to feel that somehow Fortescue's warnings about him were not so unfounded as he had thought.

After a few more words relative to the loan he required, Goldsmith continuing to protest that money never had been so scarce—whereas, from what Hallam had heard, he believed that if he had taken him a few thousands to invest, he would have vowed that it never was so plentiful—he took his leave, feeling much less self-satisfied even

than when he entered the office, except that he had the power of increasing his risks, for the sake of purchasing Hester's carriage and horses; at least this was what he told himself when he lounged into Tattersall's.

CHAPTER VI.

A WIFE'S DUTIES.

MISS MARTHA HALLAM had been 'terribly disconcerted when she learned that her beloved nephew had really married a ward of Mr. Goldsmith's—her Fred, who might have married any lady he chose to select ; and, besides the vexation of such a connection, there was a mystery and suddenness about the whole thing she did not like at all. Deeper still lay a secret misgiving she would scarcely confess to herself, much less to any one else, founded on the remembrance of a conversation one evening, between herself and her nephew on the subject of marriage. Had he—was it possible he had—married some girl only for her money ? With all her faults, Martha Hallam possessed one virtue worthy of note in the nineteenth century—she was not a money worshipper ;

she did not estimate her friends only by the size of their houses, the luxury of their furniture, the number of their carriages and servants, or, and perhaps this is the lowest and meanest way we can value people, by the style and expense of their dress.

She had thought a good deal and sounded a loud flourish about her brother's marriage, and had liked her sister-in-law all the better for having a fortune ; but in her secret heart she had rather wished it had not been derived from trade ; she was not ashamed of her father and mother, but she wished the Hallams to rise in the scale of society, and she was keen-sighted enough to see that money is not all-powerful for that purpose ; and as to Fred, she considered that his mother's fortune, and her own, would be quite sufficient for him, till his manners and his talents raised him to some post of honour and distinction in his own country, or at one of the principal Courts of Europe. This was the career she desired for him, and his path to this would be much smoothed by marrying into a good old family ; " none of your new nobility."

Martha Hallam had a way not uncommon among those who have lately risen, of designating

these as upstarts ; she might probably have winced under the term *nouveaux riches*, but "she had never given herself airs, thank goodness, and could not be called either a mushroom or an upstart," and so she would go on trying to break each end of the same stick. And now, if, after all her calculations and pretty web-weaving, Fred had married some raw country girl, who could not trace a generation beyond her grandfather !

Martha Hallam was one of the wise people who pride themselves on being obstinate—they call it firm and consistent. She had determined not to have any acquaintance with the Miss Goldsmiths, and, therefore, she would not be present at her nephew's wedding. She was equally determined now that she would see and judge her new niece for herself before she heard Mrs. Hallam's opinion. They did not always agree about Fred ; he was a Hallam, therefore he could not do wrong in his aunt's eyes ; but then his mother was a Reed, and the Reeds were richer than the Hallams, therefore their ways must be "righter." Mrs. Hallam's father lived on his own property ; in fact, he was the richest, most influential man in the neighbourhood. She had

been accustomed to see his word law, and there being no real gentry localized there, she had never received any of the wholesome "snubbing" which, when administered in gentle doses, is, no doubt, very good for every one. She had met with it in London, but then she had attributed it to the ignorance of people who did not understand her true position, and very much to her husband's low birth and his want of self-assertion. Perhaps she was right there—humility is sadly at a discount among the virtues now-a-days. We live in an age of self-help. No man waits for another to blow his trumpet; and, instead of economizing our opinions, we are fond of riding them at full trot, however lame and shambling, over those of others, who may either not have the same amount of presumption or who are not so readily full of words.

Miss Hallam and her sister were equally gifted in this respect; therefore they seldom differed openly; if they did, it nearly amounted to a quarrel, as neither would be the first to yield. But Mrs. Hallam had the compensating virtue of a cold temperament in a woman—a calm, peaceful temper; she was silly but not sensitive;

and so they agreed on the whole better than might have been expected by any one who was only acquainted with the spinster's powers of irritation.

The day after the unlucky visit in Wilton Place she arrived in Gloucester Place.

Hallam was not at home, but he had often talked of his aunt to Hester; moreover, she had sent her a set of ornaments on her marriage, pretty and becoming enough to propitiate any bride. Hester's reception was, therefore, much more cordial than it had been to her mother-in-law, who had called an hour previously and had taken Fred away with her.

The old lady expected to find Hester worthy her nephew's taste, yet she was surprised; she looked lovely as, with her cheeks tinged with the pink flush of excitement, her dark brown velvet-like eyes glistening through their fringe of black lashes, she sat quiet, nothing loth to listen while her new aunt descanted on Fred's perfections.

"I don't ask you if he makes a good husband, my dear; he couldn't do anything else, I'm sure; and I'm sure, too, you're a good and happy wife—you look

like it. I'm so glad to have seen you, my dear." She bent forward and kissed Hester again; in her surprise at her beauty and grace, she had quite forgotten her dread of a *mésalliance*. "You must come very soon and spend a long day with me, and Fred shall come to tea and fetch you home, or I suppose he can manage an early dinner now, as he has given up office. I always dine early. You shouldn't sit with your back to an open window, my dear: you'll have a stiff neck if you do. And so you've lived in the country all your life—know nothing about London ways at all, I dare say. You must be very glad to get the chance of coming to London." Martha Hallam had a great contempt for country people.

"I might have come before. I've been asked to stay in London."

Martha thought this allusion, as she supposed to the Miss Goldsmiths, trying.

"Yes, yes; but one cannot judge much of a place when with mere acquaintances only; you will find London very different now."

"I think I should have enjoyed myself very much," said Hester, warmly, and determined to explain herself. "I should have been with uncle

and aunt Wrenshaw, and they are my dearest friends."

Miss Hallam was rigid in an instant. What want of taste and tact in Hester to allude to her friends, who might be shopkeepers or something equally unmentionable! In her uncertainty of this, however, her duty was clear: she would not say anything that would annoy her new niece, but she must teach her by her manner, that henceforth her husband's family and friends must be her first consideration and all-sufficient.

"Oh, my dear, you mustn't have dearest friends now who don't belong to your husband," she said, laughing; "indeed, I always thought young wives were so devoted that they could see no merit in any one but their husbands."

"Nothing could ever make me give up uncle and aunt Wrenshaw," said Hester, so decidedly that the old lady started.

"A bad, brusque manner," she thought to herself; "her looks and her breeding don't agree."

Yesterday, perhaps, Hester would scarcely have said as much in her aunt's favour, for she had felt hurt and grieved by their long silence; but she had received a note that morning, which seemed to show

that at any rate some of her letters to Mrs. Wrenshaw had miscarried: the note said that she might expect them any day, as they were most anxious to see her, having heard of her arrival in town from Lucy, and it breathed such warm affection that Hester's heart was longing to be once more with some of her own people. This would have been incomprehensible to Martha Hallam; she considered that, when a woman married, she became, body and soul, her husband's property; that thenceforth she ought to love his parents, his brothers, his sisters, relatives and friends, as well, if not better than her own, simply because they belonged to him, forgetting that nature is never to be coerced so far as the affections are concerned, and that it would augur ill for the strength of a woman's love and constancy to her husband, if she could in a few weeks or months uproot all the holy and tender associations of childhood and youth, and supply their place with new ones.

"I don't suppose, my dear, that Fred would ever *make* you do anything you really disliked," she said, gravely; "but when a woman loves her husband as she ought, it never comes to making—his slightest wish is law."

Hester felt annoyed, she scarcely knew why ; but as she never bandied words by way of relieving her feelings, she decided that Miss Hallam was silly and prejudiced, although she was Fred's aunt, and remained silent.

"Have you had many callers yet; scarcely, though, I suppose?"

"Only one besides Mrs. Hallam; a very nice gentleman, Captain Fortescue, dined here the day before yesterday."

"Captain Fortescue! ah, yes, he is a nice person; a very first-rate man indeed. I expect you'll find Fred will be always with him, if he's in town."

"I hope not," said Hester, laughing; "I shan't like being left alone always."

"Oh, my dear, my dear, don't you make that mistake, the great mistake of young wives; never interfere with your husband's enjoyments. Why, before my brother, Mr. Hallam, married, he and I were quite as attached as any husband and wife could be, I'm sure; but he used often to go out without me, and I never grumbled, and when he went into the country or to the Continent, he usually went alone; I never

should have expected him, as a rule, to take me with him."

It seemed as if the conversation were full of stumbling-blocks.

Hester tried to get on more open ground.

"Was my father-in-law your only brother, or had you any more?"

"There was one other sister, who died young; we never knew much about her. No, my brother and I were all in all to each other; I don't suppose any brother and sister ever loved each other as we did; it is always so in small families; quite impossible in a large family, where there are so many to love, that there should be the same depth of feeling; it is more on the surface there, more frittered away."

"And yet," said Hester, thoughtfully, "I have heard it said that large families are usually the most united in affection of any, because they are generally so much less selfish."

Captain Fortescue and her husband had had an argument on this subject, and Hester had listened eagerly, and, almost unconsciously, had adopted the captain's views as her own.

Miss Hallam began rapidly to protest against

such a notion, but the arrival of visitors finished the discussion; the door was thrown open, and, to Hester's joy, Mr. and Mrs. Wrenshaw entered.

In her delight at seeing them, she forgot all about her new aunt; but as soon as the first inquiries had been made and answered, she saw Mr. Wrenshaw glancing towards the stranger, and she introduced them to each other. She blushed and felt very nervous; it was the first time she had been called on to perform such a task; but she had watched Fred carefully, and knew it ought to be done, in a case like the present.

Miss Hallam evidently considered it unnecessary; indeed, a grievous mistake; for she gave the most frigid and rigid of bows, completely frustrating Mr. Wrenshaw's attempt to shake hands, by keeping her own stiffly in the folds of her dress.

Spite of this rebuff, the cheerful, happy-tempered old gentleman, always slow to take offence, tried to enter into conversation with her, while Hester and his wife were talking; but he found it impossible to get anything but mono-

syllables in reply to his observations. Martha Hallam had far too much self-respect ever to talk to people she knew nothing about, and who might possibly be butchers and bakers—universal courtesy and she were strangers.

With all his good temper and tact, Mr. Wrenshaw had a keen insight into human nature; he soon guessed the secret of the lady's rudeness, and, turning his back upon her, left her to her meditations, earnestly wishing she would go, as of course there were a great many questions he wished to ask Hester, which her new aunt's presence prevented. But he did not quite understand Martha Hallam; she did not mind any patience or trouble so long as she accomplished her object, and she considered she had a greater right in her nephew's house than his wife's relations had; in fact, she scarcely saw what business they had there; she was quite sure Fred had not asked them, and, as has been before said, whatever Martha Hallam felt sure of, must be right. It was quite enough that her nephew should have married this country girl, should have given her the honour and glory of the name of Hallam, without being surrounded by a set of ill-bred relations, as she was certain

they were. So she sat stiff, and straight, and silent, till Mr. and Mrs. Wrenshaw fancied she must be spending the day, and that there was no use in remaining longer with the hope of any private talk. Miss Hallam scarcely acknowledged their farewell bows, and Hester followed them out into the hall to have a few last words; but there sate a man awaiting Mr. Hallam's return, so she could only speak still in the same reserved manner, and Mr. and Mrs. Wrenshaw went away with heavy hearts, for they feared their niece was not happy—at any rate, she did not seem quite her own mistress.

Martha Hallam said nothing to Hester about her visitors, and, although perhaps in some ways this was a relief, it galled her that they should be ignored altogether.

She talked much about refined reading and elegant pursuits, and seemed to take for granted that Hester must depend entirely for companionship in her husband's absence on herself and Mrs. Hallam. But she became affectionate on this topic, and, kissing Hester, again assured her that it should not be her fault if she were lonely.

When her new aunt left, Hester could scarcely tell whether she liked or disliked her; she thought she meant to be kind, but she certainly had not formed a very high opinion of her good sense or courtesy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW DEEPENS.

HESTER was growing daily more like her hard and reserved old self. Her love for her husband at first seemed to have changed her whole nature, for she worshipped him almost slavishly; in her heart she did so still; but he spent so little of his time with her now, that she had scant opportunity of showing her devotion. It seemed strange to her that when she had worked so hard to fit herself to be his companion, he should avoid her society more and more. Except for this she had no positive cause of complaint against him. He was generally kind, and cheerful, and courteous. Warmly affectionate he had never been, so that she did not miss. But a secret unsatisfied longing for something more confiding, more united in their mutual relation, was felt, although not acknowledged, by her.

She had never indulged in the romance self-created in an imaginative mind, without books or outward helps, and from her deeply felt inferiority, she possibly would have acknowledged that she must love her husband better than he could be expected to love her. Still she thought husbands and wives should be one, and it puzzled her to understand, as time went on, how, if Fred loved her at all, he could be happy to stay away so much from her, when no actual employment forced him to do so; while she sate counting the hours till his return—far more dull and listless than those of her old life—for now it seemed as if she were so bound up in him that she could not enjoy life alone.

So she would pass her time; and then, when he came in, fresh and bright, sometimes with a present he had brought as a surprise, always in such cheerful spirits that she soon found herself laughing heartily, and feeling a child again beside him, instead of the premature woman she had been all the morning—then she would take herself seriously to task for her discontent and ingratitude, and give up for the time all her half-formed resolutions of appealing to him about his indifference,

and, as it seemed, changed affection. Half-formed resolutions in a character like Hester's may be cast aside or forgotten, or rather, smothered out of sight for the time ; but it is for the time only ; they are never formed hastily, like those of an impulsive nature, and therefore they have, from being suppressed and kept back, struck deep root, and will, in spite of many checks and interruptions, grow up sturdy plants at last.

She had few visitors. She had lunched with Miss Hallam, and dined with her mother-in-law ; but Fred had, to her keen disappointment, engaged himself elsewhere. He often dined out now, and poor Hester had found Mrs. Hallam's society more irksome than anything she had yet met with. Shy as she was, she was not really timid ; but it seemed to her that at Wilton Place she was in a microscope, and she felt more awkward than she had ever been in her life. If she rose to walk across the room, it was impossible to do it easily with those cold placid blue eyes watching every movement, to see how it was executed. In all that concerned physical skill, Mrs. Hallam senior, from practice and association, had the advantage ; but when she tried to draw from her daughter-in-

law, without seeming to ask direct questions, some particulars of her early life, Hester was more than a match for her. Her own pride and reserve in speaking of herself came to the aid of Hallam's warning, never to talk of the farm, or of her life there; and when she said Good-night, she left her mother-in-law puzzled to decide whether she were the dull obtuse person her answers would have pronounced her, or, as she felt more inclined to believe, a very artful, determined young woman.

Thenceforth Mrs. Hallam considered she had been repulsed and aggrieved by her new daughter, and treated her in a kind of ill-used manner. She did not venture to complain openly to her son; he had so sternly rebuked her first attempts at finding fault with Hester, that she dared not repeat them at present. Besides, she was displeased with him; he seldom came near her now, and he ought to have broken through any engagement to dine with her, when she had given him a formal invitation. It was very bad taste to say the least of it: "Poor fellow!" sighed his mother, "it is the sad effect of unrefined association, for I feel certain that girl is low-born."

Hester now disliked her mother-in-law with all the strength of her nature ; there was a slight jealousy, too, mingled with it ; she saw how fully his mother possessed the attributes her husband was most solicitous for in her—she was thoroughly graceful and elegant. Hester looked so in repose, but she was conscious of being still awkward in her movements. Then Mrs. Hallam was an accomplished musician, and here there was perfect sympathy between mother and son ; and last, not least, although Mrs. Hallam was not by any means talented, she had a pretty way of talking, a light easy manner of saying frivolous nothings, far more likely to please most men than the most sensible conversation.

Hester found her new aunt more tolerable, although Martha Hallam was always ready to depreciate everybody and anything not essentially hers, or belonging to her family. Still she had a warm heart underneath this fault-finding, and, after all, she could not help being fond of and taking an interest in Fred's wife. So she had striven to make her niece's visit pleasant, and had thus soothed, although she had not obliterated, Hester's resentful remembrance of her conduct to the Wrenshaws.

At one time she had thought of complaining of this to her husband, but she loved him too well to vex him willingly, and it would certainly grieve him to hear of her aunt's rudeness.

She contented herself with mentioning that her aunt and uncle had called, and asking him when he could take her to see them.

He looked grave and told her there was no hurry. He had never seen them, and imagined Hester's uncle and aunt as unpresentable as her father had seemed to him; besides, he had determined, till she was of age, and the management of her money satisfactorily settled, she should not have any adviser but himself.

Hester rebelled secretly; but Fred did not say it unkindly; he even kissed her and asked her if she were tired of him that she was so anxious to be running after her relations, and an unsolicited kiss from Fred made the day a white one in Hester's memory. Lucy would have triumphed to see how thankful her proud, undemonstrative cousin was for the slightest fondness.

She sat now listening eagerly. The dinner-hour was near, and he had not returned home.

She started up as she heard him come in, and ran out into the hall to meet him, but he turned away.

She went up to him with a happy smile, and clasped his arm with both her hands.

"Oh, Fred, dearest, I thought you were never coming. How late you are!"

He drew his arm away abruptly, and muttered he wished she would not make such an exhibition of him, and then went up to his dressing-room.

Hester followed, for she thought he was ill. So he was in mind. He had been trying for two days to see Goldsmith, and had been denied admittance in such a manner that he was convinced it was intentional, and as he returned home, thoroughly out of temper at what he called the "Jew's insolence," he met a friend who confided to him that it had oozed out some trickery was contemplated towards the horse on which he had betted very largely. He had never felt so thoroughly entangled and outwitted in his life: he began to believe that Goldsmith was a shuffling old scoundrel, and then, when he reached home and wanted to be quiet, it was too much that

Hester should forget all self-respect and rush out like a school-girl, and make love to him before the servant.

Frederic Hallam was not often seriously out of temper, but, when he was, he closely resembled his mother: he became fastidious, cold, and unkind to every one; the only way was to leave him to himself; but poor Hester had not learned this way of managing him.

She followed him silently upstairs into their bedroom, out of which his room opened.

“For patience sake, Hester, do leave me alone. I have scarcely time to dress before Fortescue comes, without your coming to worry me.”

She had seen him in this sort of temper before, but then she felt that she had given him cause for vexation. Now she was blameless, and, spite of her love, Pride rose against what she considered injustice, and in an instant her manner changed. It may be all very well for a woman to assert dignity, but it is hardly a quality likely to conduce to domestic happiness. Hallam thought she had never seemed so hard and unloveable as now. She drew herself up to her full height, and saying, “Very well, then, if

you don't want me, I'll go downstairs," quitted the room.

Outside the door, she met her maid, who told her Captain Fortescue was in the drawing-room.

Hester swept past her, for she knew her face could not be natural-looking, and the prying semi-impertinence of this woman was one of her great annoyances. She had never complained of her to her husband—her nature was too proud for complaint; besides, he had found Parkins for her, and it seemed ungracious to complain of his gifts; but she had quite resolved that as soon as this country place was purchased, about which Mr. Goldsmith had spoken to her the only time she had seen him since her arrival in town, she should discharge Parkins and have Faith Stasson in her place. Faith would soon learn to be handy, and she hated to be waited on as much as Parkins considered necessary. In many ways, it often seemed to Hester that her maid was the greatest lady of the two; by herself, she would never have dreamed of half the requirements Parkins considered indispensable. She was sure it would be economy to get rid of her, and, besides this, she had the uneasy feeling that this woman had

seen her from the first, knew all her awkwardness and all her mistakes; it would be very unpleasant to have her as a perpetual reminder when she took the head of her own establishment, for it had been tacitly agreed between her and her husband that they were not to have a home of their own till she had grown more used to the world's ways.

After all, Hester wronged the woman; she pitied her mistress far more than she thought slightly of her, although she might consider her a trifle too industrious for a lady born; but she confided to Hallam's man-servant that she thought his master a very careless husband, and one who deserved that things should go wrong.

Hester paused a moment before she entered the drawing-room; she had always had a slight contempt for what she called Lucy's wheedling, coaxing ways, and yet instinct told her that if she were not too proud, too awkward for it, an affectionate petting manner was more wifely than cold haughtiness; still, sorry as she was for their disagreement, she felt that it would be a tacit falsehood to be the first to make friends: it would be owning herself in the wrong.

Captain Fortescue soon set her at her ease, and before her husband appeared had drawn her into an animated account of her visit to the opera a few nights before.

"I was so very sorry not to be able to go with you; Hallam should have let me know sooner; and you really were pleased?"

"Yes, very much; only I should enjoy it more if the words were English; I am not forward enough yet in Italian to follow the meaning."

"But you can admire the music without caring about the sense of the words, can you not?" he said, smiling.

"I am afraid you will think me very literal, but I can't," she said, blushing; she was not stiff and hard to Captain Fortescue; he was so entirely courteous to her, that she never felt shy with him.

Hallam now came in; his friend saw how cloudy he looked, but he had just met the same kind friend who had poisoned Fred's hopes of success at the races, so he wisely kept the conversation from sporting matters.

"My sister-in-law wants to know when she may call on Mrs. Hallam," Fortescue said, during dinner, looking at his friend as he spoke.

"Oh! does she? Tell her she'd better wait till we're in a house of our own. We don't intend to visit while we're here, you know; at least, my wife doesn't; or, stay, I'll call on Lady Helena myself and explain."

"Is that the beautiful Lady Helena Fortescue Mrs. Hallam told me of?" said Hester.

"Some people admire her greatly," said Captain Fortescue, smiling, "but I am not one of the number."

"By Jove, Fortescue! I can't think what you mean; I saw her in the park yesterday, and she looked handsomer than ever; besides, it's not mere beauty in her case—she looks so thorough-bred."

He had spoken pettishly, and partly to get rid of some of his angry feelings towards Hester, and yet the moment the words were uttered he felt they were ungenerous.

His wife turned very pale and pressed her lips tightly together; and she did not join in the conversation until it had turned on other topics.

Frederic Hallam must have been in a very irritable state, for he frowned at some trifling *gaucherie* of Hester's during dinner. He was still thinking of the difference between her and

Lady Helena, and how impossible it would be to introduce Hester in that kind of society.

As soon as she left the table he asked his friend to go with him to the theatre.

"Your sister said she had a box at Drury Lane to-night, and asked me to look in."

"What, with Mrs. Hallam? that will be an excellent way of introducing her to Helena."

"Oh, no; I don't think Hester would like that sort of thing; she is sadly shy, as you may see; she would rather go to the theatre quietly with me another evening; besides, I'm not going to tie myself to take my wife everywhere, I can tell you: you won't do it when you marry, Fortescue."

"As I have no intention of marrying, we won't argue that question; but it isn't fair to leave Mrs. Hallam to spend her evening alone."

"Oh, my dear fellow, she doesn't mind; she's used to it; or, well," he said, as some slight compunction for his late neglect and unkindness to her again made itself felt, "why don't you stay and make yourself agreeable? I shan't be away long, only, when I've pledged my word to a lady, I like to keep it."

Fortescue was annoyed. He knew Lady Helena's determination to be worshipped; although strong in her severe virtue, or, more truly (for she had little shielding love for her husband), safe in her coldness, she only bestowed an occasional smile in return.

He often thought, if he were Gerald, he would not allow so many dangles round his wife. He was angry with Hallam for persisting in his admiration now that he was married, and to such a wife, thought Fortescue, as he looked at Hester, "as superior to Helena, in all except style, which she will soon acquire, as a diamond is to tinsel."

Hallam did not go with his friend to the drawing-room, and his wife's manner puzzled Fortescue, for she seemed rather pleased to hear that her husband had gone out, than disappointed that he had left her.

In reality, she was so tired of lonely evenings that it was a relief he had chosen this one when she had a companion, as it gave her some hope that the next might be spent at home, and she was unwilling that Fortescue should notice Fred's unkind manner. Probably going out (Fortescue had not said where he was gone) would make

him quite himself again ; his anger never lasted long.

She was surprised to find how pleasantly the evening passed without him.

For the first time in her life, she was enjoying the conversation of a well-read, highly-educated man, too nobly gifted himself not to appreciate and take delight in drawing out her powers of reflection and observation, and sufficiently *blasé* with society to enjoy keenly the freshness of her remarks.

He made her talk of much that she had seen in Italy and Switzerland, and from him she gathered with eager interest many bits of information concerning the history and antiquities of many of the remarkable cities she had visited.

"But Hallam surely told you these things?"

"My husband hardly ever had time to go anywhere with me ;" then noticing his look of surprise, she checked herself and added, "you know, if I had not been so ignorant, I ought to have heard some of these things from the guides ; but I had never learned Italian till after my marriage."

She looked up at him as if she expected he would be astonished at her ignorance, but he was

completely fascinated. He felt sure she possessed latent, though uncultivated, mental power, while she was so simple still, so thoroughly unaffected in all she said and did. He longed to know more of her and her past history, and he thought that in the frank, confiding mood she was in, she would readily have satisfied his curiosity ; but Hallam had so clearly shrunk from the subject that Fortescue felt he had no right to cross-question Hester about what her husband probably wished unknown.

Hallam did not return till his friend was leaving. He was more cheerful, but his manner to his wife seemed as cold as it had been at dinner-time.

Fortescue walked slowly home. He wondered how long Hester's devotion to her husband would stand such a strain upon it. She had avoided rather than sought the mention of his name ; but her eyes, when she looked at him, and a sort of undefinable manner when in his presence, convinced Fortescue that she worshipped him. " Strange creatures women are—strange, unaccountable creatures ! "

He shrugged his shoulders ; somehow or other his friend had sunk in his esteem lately, since he had seen him with his wife.

"I always liked Fred for his social companionable qualities rather than because any great sympathy existed between us. He is one of those men one's heart opens to of its own accord, so thoroughly good-tempered and bright, but that's not the sort of thing to take women, at any rate such a creature as that. I'm fairly puzzled to imagine how she has managed to make him into an idol; it must be a simple case of infatuation, and, unluckily, quite one-sided, I'm afraid. Master Fred shows very bad taste: that girl has only half developed mentally; in fact, she's only beginning to do so; she'll no more be able to make a companion of him than she'll fly, and I'm afraid her love won't stand the revelation of her idol's inferiority, if she gets no love or devotion in return."

And he congratulated himself that he had never married, and wondered whether the infatuation of love was strong enough to blind women lastingly to their husbands' failings, and came to the conclusion that the only chance for this would be in a case where the love was equal on both sides; therefore he again shrugged his shoulders, and thought Fred had better mind what he was about.

CHAPTER VIII.

HESTER SPEAKS.

HESTER had the forbearance to wait till next morning, before she spoke to her husband. After she left the dinner-table on the previous evening, she thought over all that had passed, and made up her mind that she must in some way have offended him, and that it would be better to ask what it was about. An indistinct feeling of discontent and unhappiness, a glimpse of the cloud of coming evil, weighed on her spirits. He had certainly stayed at home much more in Italy than he did now. Was it—and an uncomfortable thought traversed her brain, she was not fertile in inventing troubles, although she liked to ponder over them—was it that, now he was near his own friends again—fine fashionable people like Lady Helena Fortescue—he saw the difference

between them and herself? Poor Hester! this was a cruel thought, but Fortescue came upstairs so soon that she had not had time to consider it fully.

Hallam appeared at breakfast earlier than usual, so it seemed a good opportunity.

She did not go up to him, or use any little fondling way of softening her appeal; if she had vexed him, it had been unwillingly, and she felt he had made no atonement for his unkindness.

"Fred, why were you so angry with me yesterday?"

A shadow of some kind must have come across the reverence of her love, for she did not feel timid, or as if she were afraid of offending him.

"Angry was I?" he scarcely raised his eyes from his newspaper. The silence that followed seemed to attract his attention; he looked up, and Hester's pale face and determined expression aroused him to the full consciousness that something unusual was happening.

"Eh! what! angry!" he repeated, as if awakening from sleep. "Yes, I remember I was cross because I wanted my dinner, and I'd been bored about business. You mustn't mind about such trifles, my dear girl, really you mustn't," he added

seriously, for the expression of her face annoyed him, she seemed to be taking such a very high hand in the matter. "I'm a good-tempered fellow, and so you've not got used to it; but you should see what some women have to take quietly. I dare say it is not the last time you'll find me cross before dinner; only take a word of advice, Hester, as you've recurred to disagreeables yourself—always leave me alone at such times, I hate to be bothered when I'm cross."

The servant came in with the letters; so Hester had time to think over her reply. This way of answering her appeal had quite disconcerted her view of her wrongs. He seemed to think he had a right to be cross, and that she was fortunate that he was not so often.

He might be right. Hester felt how ignorant she was of the behaviour of married people, but this was the slightest part of her complaint. What she wanted explained was, why, when he seemed so frank and open to every one, was he so reserved towards her; and why did he seem to care so little—or, more truly, not at all—for her confidence? Captain Fortescue had made her feel that she could entertain her husband, if he would only stay

at home sometimes, and talk to her in the same way. He could teach her so much that she now spent hours in diving into books for ; her thirst for knowledge had become insatiable lately ; but then if he did stay at home, he always went on the sofa after dinner, and slept a great part of the evening.

There were several letters for him this morning, and only one for her, and she sat thinking before she looked to see who it was from. But before he had finished reading the last and most important looking of his letters, an exclamation of pleasure from Hester made him look up.

“Who’s your letter from?”

“From Lucy ; and, Fred, she wants us to go down and stay a few days with them next week ; will it not be delightful ? ”

“Very delightful, no doubt. But, my dear child, your cousin Lucy must live sadly out of the world, not to know that next week is Tatton races, and to expect Londoners to bury themselves in the country just as the season has begun in earnest sounds like a joke.”

The smile vanished from Hester’s face.

“But, Fred, you did not say so when her last

letter came, saying she was going to ask us soon; you said I might write and thank her, so I think we are pledged to go."

"You may think what you like," said her husband, "but I'm not going to give up Tatton for any country cousins whatever; but I tell you what, Hester, if you like you may go down to Stedding; you can take Parkins, you know."

Hester's self-will had not often been called into action since her marriage, but it was fully roused now. It seemed to her that she had been led into giving a tacit promise to accept Lucy's invitation, and that now she must break her word.

"But, Fred, we could put it off till the week after the races; shall you not be able to go then?"

"Certainly not; so don't worry any more. You had better write to-day, and say you will go to them next Monday; the change will do you good."

He turned to leave the room.

"Don't go, I want to speak to you, Fred." Her cheeks were flushed, and she spoke in her harsh sententious way. "It seems very strange that you should send me away from you, so soon after we are married. I don't understand it; you won't let me go to aunt Wrenshaw here in London, who would

love me, and make me happy, and yet you seem glad to send me away altogether." Her eyes filled with tears, but her pride kept them back.

"Good heavens!" Hallam looked thoroughly annoyed now. "What on earth do you mean. Why, I myself heard Goldsmith tell you, that the last alteration your father made in his will was to desire that you were not placed under the care of your uncle Wrenshaw. He had some good reason for this, you may be certain, and I have considered it my duty to keep you apart."

"My father did not forbid all intercourse between us," she said, slowly and distinctly; "but what I should like to know is if you really want to get rid of me, because, unless you do, I had rather not go to Stedding without you."

If Hallam had told the truth, he would have said, yes. Her manner was so haughty—so unlike anything he had ever seen in her before—that he shuddered, and felt a positive dread and dislike of his future life with her. He believed when once women took to lecturing their husbands, they never lost an opportunity of exercising the talent.

"What a fuss you are making about nothing. What on earth do you mean by such folly?"

Really, Hester, you ought to know better. Do husbands and wives never pay country visits alone, do you think?"

"I don't know, but I have been wanting to tell you for some time, that I am not happy; not as happy as I think you would like me to be. I see little enough of you, and now you seem to wish to send me away altogether."

Hallam by a strong effort repressed his impatience, and the angry words that were in his mind to speak: Hester's manner had something serious and impressive in it, that mastered him in spite of himself. He walked to the window and frowned at the opposite houses.

After a minute or two he turned round.

"How can you be so silly," he said, in a calmer tone; "I never said you were to go to Stedding unless you liked; only I must be away two or three days next week, and I thought you would not like being alone."

"But I could go with you."

Hallam was confounded. What change had come over his quiet wife, she seemed to be inclined to manage him completely.

"No, Hester, you must allow me to be the best

judge of the society into which I take you. I am going to Tatton races, if you must know, with a party of gentlemen, and I don't think all of them fit associates for my wife; but if you like," he added, as a new idea occurred to him, "you can stay with my mother while I'm away; I know she would take good care of you."

"No, thank you," she said, proudly, for she keenly felt how he had evaded her question; "I don't mind about being alone, Fred; I ought to be pretty well used to that, I think; at any rate, I would rather be quite alone than with any one who despises me as your mother does."

"Hester, you are possessed this morning, I believe—if you have kept your own counsel, what on earth can my mother or any one else find to despise in you?"

The words were well chosen, and they soothed her for the moment, but he said them as coldly as if he were speaking to some indifferent person.

"I did not say she had any right to behave as she does; but she thinks I am beneath her, and I hate people who do so; and it is so false to pretend to kiss me and treat me like a daughter, and then to wound me by ill-natured words."

“Stop, stop, Hester! don’t go so fast; you must not take up an unfounded prejudice against my mother; you don’t understand each other yet, and you’ve seen so little of each other, I don’t wonder.”

She went on as if he had not spoken.

“I will not see your mother alone any more, Fred, till she treats me differently; and as to your aunt—I did not mean to tell you, but it seems as if I had better, or you will say I have taken up a prejudice against her too—she has not been unkind to me, but she almost insulted uncle and aunt Wrenshaw, the day they came here. They mayn’t be her friends, but they are mine, and I love them, and I should think you would wish your wife’s friends treated with respect; at least I thought husband and wife were one and the same, but your relations don’t seem to think so.”

However aggrieved he might be by her way of speaking, the truth of the last sentence was indisputable; his mother’s manner had greatly annoyed him, and he could quite believe it was worse when he was out of the room; however, he felt he must say a word for his aunt.

“You are unreasonable, Hester; people never

take to their relations by marriage at once ; aunt Martha is silly and eccentric—almost all old maids are, unless they are very humble-minded—but she's a kind-hearted creature, and she told me herself she was very fond of you, and if you would just humour her and let her patronize you a little, you would get on famously. But now look here, I don't like disturbances ; I shan't be home till dinner-time, and I'm going out directly after on business. I give you my word, it is on business, Hester. I tell you this, that we mayn't have another fuss. I am sure you'd take things quietly, if you knew how very unpleasant it is to me to be spoken to as you have spoken this morning ; so shake hands, and make up your mind it's all fancy and nonsense about my wanting to get rid of you. I'm off now," and with an unusual kiss, he left the room.

Hallam wondered to himself how it was that he had not given his wife what he would have called "a good blowing up." The longer he reflected upon their morning's conversation, the greater became his surprise. That she, an ignorant country girl of nineteen, a mere child in every way, should dare to lecture and set herself in opposition to

him, when he had done her the unspeakable service of marrying her, and making her more of a lady than she could have possibly been without his help, utterly overwhelmed him.

He had noticed a change in her manner lately; she had grown quieter, harder, and more abrupt; but she had not been very well, and he thought perhaps she wanted a little change of air. Still it was most unreasonable. He had hired a carriage for her, so that she could drive out every day if she liked; he had taken her to the opera, given her some new bracelets and a necklace: what more could she wish for?

"I believe it's a struggle for power," he said to himself; "I don't blame her for trying, women always do it; but if a man throws himself away on a country girl, the least he expects is to be master in his own house; perhaps it would be wiser to let her see a little more society; she'd soon find out that husbands are not expected to be tied to their wives' apron-strings from morning till night. It's odd; she is the last girl I should have expected any temper from; however, I should think after what I said she'll be careful; still it's unpleasant to feel she has a temper; however,

she is so fond of me that for her own sake she'll keep it in check."

Still he felt dissatisfied with the way he had behaved; it seemed to him that he ought to have been more angry, and it was equally unpleasant to be conscious of the revolution that had taken place in his ideas about her. Do as he would, he could no longer regard her as the half-formed, inferior creature he had married only a few months ago.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRUTH.

HESTER had surprised herself quite as much as her husband; she did not understand nor could she control the sudden "Berserker"-like anger that had prompted her to speak as she had done; she had been subject to it as a child, then for a time it had passed away, but, as we have seen, it had once returned in her home-life after she had first seen Hallam. She did not regret anything she had said to him, only she wished it had been said differently. Why was it? what could it be? She felt sure that with Mrs. Hallam, whom she disliked, she could never be tempted to anger—she should always have power to control herself. It was strange that only with her father and with her husband, the two beings she had loved best, she should have given way to it. Poor Hester!

she did not remember the effort it had cost her to speak on each occasion. It is a hard task to root up a stately pine-tree, but when once that is accomplished, 'ware the fall; it thunders down the side of the mountain, not to be arrested by any intervening obstacle.

She had told Fred now all that was on her mind—she hoped he was not offended past forgiveness—but no, he had shaken hands and kissed her at parting; she would try and remember his advice; she thought if he loved her there would be little trouble in following it, and now that she had said she disliked being left alone he would, no doubt, make more of a companion of her. If he loved her—as yet she did not really believe in his want of love, although misgivings, shadowy forerunners of the truth, would trouble her; she resolved to try and be as gentle as possible to atone for her angry words; after what he had said, it would be better not to take any notice of their quarrel, but look cheerful and contented.

She kept her resolution, and Hallam was surprised and pleased, and when he went out, came back again to say he should be home early.

He was glad she had the sense to avoid a scene

or an explanation ; he really did not mean to tie himself to stay at home any more than before ; but he thought he should humour her for a few days, especially as he intended to stay away the whole of the race week.

He was, therefore, glad, on the whole, that the dispute had happened. Hester's spirits were certainly more cheerful, during the next few days, and one evening that he spent at home, when Captain Fortescue was there, instead of going to sleep, he exerted himself sufficiently to take his full share in the conversation. And Fortescue decided that what had taken place before was exceptional.

Hester was happy again ; it was plain to her that if her husband saw more of her, the confidence she so much desired would soon be established between them, and from what he had said, she felt sure that even if they did not settle in the country this year, they should go away together in the autumn, to some place apart from these fashionable friends, for whom she felt an equal dislike and awe.

On Monday morning, the day preceding that on which Hallam intended to go to Tatton, he

left home as usual soon after breakfast. Hester was standing at the dining-room window, studying the weather; for Captain Fortescue, on the previous evening, had been extolling the beauties of Surrey, and she was meditating a long drive. She had a keen appreciation of landscape beauties, although, from her want of artistic taste, she had little eye for the picturesque, either in form or colour, or for minor natural beauties, such as wild flowers or plants; distant views and fine trees she could admire, but she had always thought Lucy trifling and foolish, for peering into hedges and ditches, when they were walking together, or raving about the wild grace of a common bramble bush.

Suddenly her husband passed the window, and came up the steps; between surprise and joy, Hester lost all presence of mind; she had been looking forward to hours of solitude; it seemed as if the sun had suddenly burst from behind the bank of clouds she had been studying. Without pausing to reflect, she had darted out into the hall, and opened the door before he could knock.

At the same moment, Parkins appeared on the staircase.

Hallam did not speak, but his look of intense

annoyance recalled Hester to herself, and Parkins' alarmed expression as she hurried forwards to close the door again, confirmed her in the conviction that she had committed some grievous crime against the proprieties of life.

Her husband did not speak till he had closed the dining-room door upon them both, and then he turned to her with a look of his mother in his face, that made her almost shudder.

"Hester, I must beg you to remember that you have servants of your own, and that there are plenty belonging to this house; if you do not care for the opinion of any stranger who might have been passing, at least recollect my feelings, and do not disgrace yourself in this manner again. Good heavens! suppose my mother had seen you!"

"I will not do it again," she said, gently, for she was vexed that Parkins had been a witness of her mistake. "I was so pleased to see you, Fred, I forgot all else."

"Well, never mind, only don't do it again. Just give me my new cardcase, will you, and see that it has cards in it. I took out this empty one this morning; that's a little thing you might see to, Hester."

She flew to fetch his cardcase. He had the love of being waited on peculiar to some men, rarely to those of a very unselfish, tender nature—I mean where their wives are concerned. Hester was willing enough to do what he wished, unbidden; but then her ignorance of society and its ways made her, of course, unable to anticipate all his requirements.

The cardcase was soon found, and he was gone, but the little incident had left a very unequal impression on his wife's mind to that which it had produced on his own.

She thought it was a pity she had been so hasty in acting, without staying to think first; but she had told Fred she was sorry, and there was an end of it; and, after all, there could be no real harm in opening the door to her husband because she was glad to see him home again; if there were, the rebuke was greater than the fault.

But Hallam was seriously annoyed.

Hester had always seemed so calm, so self-possessed, so free from any girlish folly or romance, that he had never imagined, with all her short-comings, she could make him ridiculous. He could not bear to be laughed at, and, with

the usual inconsistency of a man who makes a *mésalliance*, he considered any infringement of the conventions of society a heinous offence against good breeding.

His ruffled mood increased when he found admittance again refused him at Mr. Goldsmith's office; however, this time it seemed that the lawyer really was out of town, for his head clerk vouchsafed the intelligence that he had gone down to Stedding, to look after some property in that neighbourhood.

Hallam immediately guessed he had gone to look after the farm, which, for the present, had been put under Peter Stasson's care, at Hester's express request. He knew very well that her great wish was to have the farmhouse put in thorough repair, and furnished for a future home for them; but to this he was decidedly opposed, although, with his usual easy way of managing matters, he had not contradicted her when she suggested the idea. But now he was angry and thwarted, for it was almost indispensable that he should see Goldsmith again before he left town. He wondered what he was doing at Kirton's Farm: it was only a short time ago that he had told him

was just returned thence—surely he could not be planning such an absurdity as their residence there. He chafed like an untamed horse at the subjection in which the lawyer seemed resolved to hold him till Hester came of age. It was unendurable to be no longer a free man in any way, to be tied to a wife for whom he did not feel strong liking (Frederic Hallam had never thought about the possibility of being in love with any woman yet), and whom he was now becoming ashamed of; if this sort of thing was to go on till she came of age, he knew he should dislike her. His idea in marrying a fortune had been that there would be plenty of means to render them independent of each other; a large house to begin with, so that if their tempers did not suit, they need not often meet; then would come the infinitude of distractions and pleasurable occupation which riches always entail. He had never intended to lose any of the freedom of his life by marriage; but he had taken a one-sided view of the question. He had not considered that his wife might be unfit for, or that she might shrink from, the fashionable world in which all these engrossing pursuits (which, if he had reasoned it

out, were intended to fulfil the place of a husband's love and companionship) were to be found; he began to think of Hester now as a pale, voluntary prisoner, to whom he was fettered by anything but chains of roses or even of gold.

He forgot all his life of debt and anxiety, and sighed for the time when he had no wife to interfere with his comfort and his liberty.

"Ah, Fortescue!" he exclaimed, as he met his friend just as he reached Piccadilly; "what a lucky fellow you are to be a free man still!"

Fortescue took his friend's arm, and they sauntered along together under the trees.

"What's the matter now, Fred? you don't look yourself; and what sort of freedom are you congratulating me on? To tell you the truth, I'm not a fit object for it just now, if you're talking of money."

"Money, no! I was not thinking of money then—though to be hard up is bad enough—I mean you are wise not to have married, that's all."

Fortescue looked serious. Hallam had often advised him: it seemed a fitting moment to give a little counsel in return.

"You must pardon me, Hallam ; but of all men I should have thought you might have been congratulated on your marriage."

"You mean because of the money."

"No, the compliment is strictly personal."

Hallam looked round to be certain no one was within hearing.

"I have kept this to myself as long as I could bear it, but now I must tell some one—and it had better be you than any one else, old fellow—because I know you are safe. I don't like my wife."

There was a pause. "I am very sorry to hear you say so," and Fortescue looked really concerned.

"Look here, understand what I mean ; she's all very well,—a nice, pretty girl and all that ; but it will cost me a fortune to get her educated. I've spent I don't know how much already. Why, she can't even dance. You must see yourself ; she makes a courtesy like a charity girl."

It did occur to Fortescue, whose was the money spent, after all ? He said,—

"Well, but she is very young, and all these are superficial grievances. Mrs. Hallam has, I feel

persuaded, so much natural ability and good sense that you might make anything of her."

He spoke earnestly, and yet, strangely enough, it seemed to him that he was not really anxious for a better understanding between Hester and her husband.

Hallam answered, impatiently,—

"I wish her good sense would teach her a little self-control, then. This morning I went back for something I had forgotten, and, by Jove, she came flying out like a school-girl, and opened the street-door to me herself."

Fortescue laughed.

"That does not seem a very serious offence; some men would be thankful if their wives were as fond of them."

"Oh, nonsense, Percy! I always tell you, you are romantic; people don't bother themselves about fondness and love, and that sort of thing, in their wives, in real life, as they do in books—at least if they do it's all pretence—I'm no hypocrite," he said, earnestly, for his friend's contradiction was leading him to say far more than he had at first intended. "I never meant to make a love-marriage. My belief is, love-marriages are twaddle."

Fortescue felt that he ought to say something for the wife.

"Listen to me, and don't think me impertinent, because you began the subject yourself. It seems to me, you see too little of your wife to care much about her."

Hallam shrugged his shoulders.

"I should have thought," Fortescue went on, "that, with your taste and judgment about manner, and your wife's evident devotion to you, you might soon, by a few judicious hints, rectify the little errors you complain of. Think how young you both are; and if you begin now, by taking no pains to find a companion in your wife or to fit her to go with you into society—which last," he added, reluctantly, for he felt strangely unwilling that Hester should lose her present simplicity, in his eyes her greatest charm, "as you value conventional manners so highly, would be your wisest course—let me finish," he added, as Hallam turned away—"how will it be with you both twenty years hence? Instead of having adapted yourselves to each other's ways and tempers, you will have both grown hard and selfish, even if nothing worse happens."

"Fortescue, you've turned parson; but if you knew how heartily I am wishing just at this moment that I'd never seen her, that I'd never been ass enough to marry at all, you'd understand my speaking out as I have done. I haven't said, Heaven knows, half or anything of what I feel or what I suffer from; only understand this in so many words—I don't want to excuse it, I believe I was wrong, but it's done now—I never cared two straws about her before I married her—it was only the money; and now don't let us talk any more about it—it's a hopeless case, which talking will not cure."

"Our roads part here," said his friend, abruptly, "so good-by. When do you start?"

"The first thing to-morrow morning. I wish you'd come. I go alone, of course, with Faulkner and that lot."

"No, I can't change my mind now; in fact, I have several engagements for the week."

"Well, it's the first time I shall have gone down without you," said Hallam. He was sorry already for the vehemence with which he had received his friend's advice. "But if I find out anything to-morrow that you can turn to any account

on Wednesday morning, I'll drop you a line. Good-by."

Fortescue was glad to be alone—to be freed from his friend's unwelcome company. No; he could scarcely call him his friend now; his soul had been disappointed and revolted by all that Hallam had said.

To a man of such refined honour as Percy Fortescue, it seemed a living lie to marry a woman solely for her money, and when he thought of Hester, it was impossible not to feel anger against the man who could speak of her as her husband had done.

And there was another feeling that he wanted to be alone to understand. Spite of his wish to see Mrs. Hallam happy and duly appreciated, there mingled in his anger with his friend a feeling of relief; and now, as he turned into the park to have his musings to himself, he thought he had been hard on Fred. Was it his fault if he could not appreciate or understand such a mind as Hester's? A delicious pleasurable sensation stole over him as he recalled the last conversation he himself had had with her, and the thorough sympathy she had evinced in his opinions and tastes.

He had been spending much of his time in Gloucester Place lately ; he hoped Hallam would not stay away a whole week ; he supposed it would not quite do to call in his absence, for Hester's society was becoming essential to him. Fortescue had never had a younger sister, and his feeling for her was just what he should have entertained for one—she was so entirely free from coquetry, he had no fear she would mistake his attentions ; besides, spite of what he had just said to Hallam, he believed she was cold, and would never care much for her husband or any one else, except as a friend ; and therefore, as her husband shrank from taking the first place in her friendship—disliked her even—why should not he be the guide and counsellor she so much wanted, and enjoy in return the charm of seeing such an intellect develope under his fostering care ?

He did not stay much to analyse his feelings, and he resolutely, or more probably unconsciously, shut his eyes to the future ; for the present Hester was neglected, probably unhappy ; it was his duty to brighten her life. His theory did not proceed to show how this duty had devolved on *him* ; but then theories, viewed through the delusive

glass of inclination, are apt to be more imperfect and faulty than we imagine. Captain Fortescue did not know it, but he was really in love for the first time in his life. Had he known it, he would have avoided Mrs. Hallam's society, but he was blind.

CHAPTER X.

SELF-DECEIVED.

GOOD-NATURED Mrs. Frank Wrenshaw was in a state of consternation when Lucy told her the contents of Hester's letter.

"Not coming, ain't they? then it's a great deal too bad," she exclaimed; "after she'd promised to come and all; and you and Rachel sitting up, sewing trimming on that new dimity bed, and all the carpets beat and muslin curtains, and getting the spare room so nice. Well, I never; and I'd ordered, last market-day, two couple of fowl, and nosegays, and I don't know what all, to be brought in to-morrow, thinking you'd be sure and want 'em. I tell you what, Lucy, you may say what you please, but your cousin Hester's grown stuck-up; she's been mounted up so high with all these London folks, that she can't stoop her head down to see such as you and me

are—her own flesh and blood, too; I've no patience with such fancies, saying she'll come one week, and then changing her mind the next; shilly-shallying nonsense, it makes me as cross as—as a blue baboon."

Lucy was sadly disappointed, but she could not sit by and hear Hester blamed.

"You must remember, mother, you never liked poor Hester, and I think you are hard upon her now; she has faults, of course—everybody has, but I never saw her shilly-shally about anything; and Jacob says——"

"Ah, of course, Jacob thinks something different to what I do. Really, Lucy, for a girl who used to be fond of having her own way, I don't believe you've an idea of your own in your head, that I don't. It's Jacob says this, and Jacob thinks the other, till I sometimes feel as if he was my husband, too, and I must believe all he says."

"Well, mother," Lucy had turned very red during her mother's speech, "and usen't you to be just the same with my father?"

"Oh, but that was quite a different thing; why, he was your own father, Lucy; you're surely not going to compare any one to him."

Lucy burst out laughing, in spite of her vexation that her mother should speak slightly of Jacob.

"Well, mamma, there never can be any use in talking of one's husband; no one else ever sees him with one's own eyes; but for Hester's sake, I should like you to hear what Jacob says about this letter; may I tell you?"

"Yes, yes, my dear, of course," said Mrs. Wrenshaw, already rather ashamed of what she had said; for she was both fond and proud of her son-in-law, although it was irritating to have his opinion so constantly quoted against her own.

"He thinks that poor Hester has not been allowed to accept our invitation, and that probably her husband wishes her to give up her own relations altogether."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Wrenshaw; "and from what I can make out, he owes everything to the poor child. I believe he hadn't a penny to buy boots with when he married her; but still, Lucy, I say again, Hester ought to hold her own; however, Jacob's wrong in one way; the husband can't shut her away from all of us. Old Biz told me some time ago that she believed it was a settled

thing, that, after a bit, they were to live at Kirton's Farm."

"But, mamma," Lucy looked incredulous, "how can Biz know?"

"Well, I don't know, my dear, I didn't ask her; only she seems positive about it; and now, Lucy, don't you go contradicting every word I say. It seems to me, you make amends for giving up your own way to Jacob, by not letting me have anything right about me."

"Mamma, don't." Lucy stood still for a moment, struggling with her waywardness; then she threw her arms round her mother's neck. "I beg your pardon, and I'm very sorry; but mother, dear, I believe I can't help these naughty fits, if you find fault with Jacob. There, I know what you are going to say—you do it to prevent me from spoiling him; but you may trust me, mother," she said, wiping away her tears, "I do not idolize my husband. I will tell you, if it will make you happier, that I can see his faults, although I like others to be blind to them; but he would not be human if he were perfect, and one thing I am sure of—the nearer and closer we are to a person, the more truly are we able to

appreciate their good qualities, and to see how completely these counterbalance any tiny failings."

"There, there," said her mother, kissing her, "don't excite yourself, there's a dear child. You know I love Jacob very much. Good gracious me! what will he say if he finds you with red eyes when he comes in? I don't know what's come over you, you cry twice as easily as you used to."

"Do I?" said Lucy, smiling; she thought to herself that her mother was mistaken, but she would not contradict her again. "When did you see Biz?" she inquired.

"Oh, she came to see me yesterday, poor old thing! Rachel had met her in the street, and told her about Hester's being expected, and she seemed quite in a fuss about it—talked about Mr. Hallam's whiskers, and his boots, and the way he curled 'em in a dish-cover."

"She was very much pleased at the idea of seeing Hester, I suppose," said Lucy, laughing.

"Yes, but you know she's always got a grievance; she keeps 'em ready made, I believe, to suit all occasions. She said she thought Miss Hester might have written to tell her she was

coming. Why, in course, she'd have had a new gown and a paper put up in her parlour, as she made no doubt Mr. Hallam and his wife would take tea with her."

"Which I very much doubt, even if they ever come at all, although it wouldn't do to tell Biz so, poor old creature."

"Well," said Mrs. Wrenshaw, looking guilty and confused, "I—I told her so, my dear, and she began to cry and to make such a piece of work, I didn't know how to stop her; and when you think about the thirty pounds a year, and the cottage and all, and the way she goes on about blackbeetles and toothache, she really is a discontented old worri-cow."

"Jacob says—" began Lucy, but here she remembered, and began to hunt diligently in her work-basket for some seemingly undiscoverable reel of cotton. "Oh, by-the-by," she continued, "don't you think, mamma, it might be as well not to mention this intended visit of Hester's to any one else; you know what a place Stedding is for making mountains out of molehills."

"I'm sure I never said anything of the sort, Lucy. I think Stedding's a very good sort of

place; nobody in this world ever got gossiped about who didn't deserve it. However, if you wish the thing to be made a mystery of, of course I shall say nothing, every one knows what a quiet, safe person I am. Of course I told Jemima Skipper that you expected your cousin, but then she never gossips."

"You might as well have told all Stedding," was on Lucy's lips; but she checked herself before the words were uttered, and her mother went on:

"I shall tell her now, that the visit is deferred, that'll be the best way, won't it? Of course, I shan't say what I think, I shall leave her to form her own arguments. Why, good gracious me, here's Jacob; how late it must be!"

Mr. Bonham came in, looking not quite so happy as he usually did to find himself at home again. He was tired and hungry, much too tired to talk, and the sight of his mother-in-law was as unwelcome as the sight of any one but Lucy would have been. But Mrs. Wrenshaw did not remark this. She refused her daughter's invitation to stay and drink tea with them; but, although she said "good-by," and let Jacob rise to open the door for her, she kept him standing quite ten

minutes, while she expatiated on the folly of marrying above one's station, and the impossibility of Hester's happiness. At last she noticed his wearied look.

"Good gracious, you're tired out, and I keeping you standing all the while; I'm sure you're glad to get rid of me, aren't you now?"

And then she went away, not home though, but to her friend Jemima; and soon furnished that able architect with the materials for a first-rate scandal.

"I'm sorry I kept mamma so long, dearest; it was my fault."

"Oh, never mind, so long as I get some tea," said her husband, considerably mollified at finding himself treated as the aggrieved person, when he was conscious of the ungracious looks he had bestowed on his mother-in-law.

Lucy did not say another word till he had put on his slippers and drank a cup of tea, and then she told him what Bix had told her mother.

"I heard that said before the marriage, Lucy, but I did not tell you, because I felt sure it would end in nothing. Is it likely that, with their means of

living, and the power to purchase an estate wherever they please, with a gentleman's house on it in good repair, such a man as Mr. Hallam would consent to spend the large sum necessary to make the farmhouse even habitable? Besides, Lucy—I don't want to vex you, darling—but your cousin Hester, judging even by her letter, is a very different person from what she was at Kirton's Farm."

"Oh, Jacob! I'm sure she writes as affectionately as ever," said Lucy, indignantly.

It was a sore subject, for, although she had defended him to her mother, she thought, in her secret heart, that Jacob was unjust to Hester. He certainly always had something to say against her; perhaps, young husbands are rarely fond of those among their wives' friends who possess influence over them.

"Now, don't look cross, Lucy, or you'll make me savage. Come and sit here, you old pet; there now," he added, as he put his arm round her; "you'll listen to reason now, won't you? What I mean is—only you are such an impulsive monkey, there's no saying a word, sometimes"—Lucy nestled her head on his shoulder, by way of asking for-

giveness—"that Hester is a lady now, and may possibly not care to be reminded of bygones, as Kirton's Farm must infallibly remind her; and for the same reason, darling, I would have you on your guard; don't expect much of Hester; you are so sensitive, that I know how any slight coldness will make you suffer; far better make up your mind at once to give up Hester's affection; your paths in life are quite different, and are not likely to bring you together."

"But, Jacob, suppose you are mistaken; and, oh! suppose, worse than all, that the poor thing is not happy—that her husband does not love her as you do me—will it not be very selfish to give her up till she has shown plainly she no longer cares for me?"

"In my opinion she has done so; this letter is too cold and guarded in its tone to be written by the unformed girl I remember as your cousin. Depend upon it, she's a woman of the world by this time—and now give me another cup of tea, darling."

Neither of them spoke for a little while. Theirs was a love of such perfect sympathy that, though they had only been a few months married, each

knew the other's mood, without need of explanation, or fear of being misunderstood.

To Jacob the delight of sitting in perfect silence, watching his wife's movements, and her pretty little ways, was intense; or, if she were in a talkative mood, he would sit looking and listening, with just a stray word or two of answer, till she often told him she believed, if she repeated the same jokes and stories a hundred times, he would always fancy them new. Sometimes she insisted that it was her turn to be amused, and that he ought to talk to her, or she should become an inveterate chatterbox. But he had always the plea of his hard work during the day; he had to speak constantly, and she had so much rest for her tongue; he always gained his point: perhaps women don't dislike talking so very much, after all. Lucy certainly did not.

Jacob sat now thinking of the difference between the cousins, and how much love Lucy's ardent affectionate nature had lavished on one whom he believed to be as cold as a stone. It made him sad, too, to think, how his darling would suffer, when she became practically convinced of this truth, for he knew how deeply sensitive her

feelings were, although to others this was completely hidden under her laughing vivacious manner. He should be glad when it was all over, and she was reconciled to the loss of her cousin. Probably he was not aware of the hidden jealousy he had for Lucy's affection for any one but himself; but then, poor man! this was not his fault—she worshipped him so entirely, that she had made him exacting.

Lucy was thinking how much she should like to go up to London, and see Hester, and find out if she really were unhappy. She had written to her aunt Wrenshaw, asking if she had seen her, and her aunt had answered her letter, without taking any notice of the inquiry. I have said that Lucy was imaginative in early childhood, and since she had left school (practical routine having dispersed her day-dreams, so long as school life continued) she had lived in an unreal world, for ever forecasting events, and building scenes and incidents upon them, coloured with the bright or sombre tints of her fancy. Now, as she bent over the fire, making Jacob a fresh piece of toast, she conjured up a sorrowful picture of her cousin, married to a husband who did not appreciate her,

for she remarked that Frederic Hallam's name was rarely mentioned in his wife's letters; probably forced to associate with uncongenial people; and oh! perhaps hardest of all to Lucy's free mind, obliged to live in a dingy London house, without any garden or any flowers; this last idea was so overpowering that she could not keep it to herself.

"Oh, how dreadful to think of!"

"What! that you've blackened my toast against the bars, while you've been mooning?" said Jacob, who had been watching her.

"No, you naughty boy, and I've hardly blacked it at all; but think of that poor dear Hester without any flowers."

Jacob laughed. "Why, you little goose, I expect she has much better flowers than you have, and besides, I know by instinct she's not a woman to care about flowers."

"Jacob! but you mean bought flowers; as if there ever can be the same sentiment about flowers that you don't rear yourself."

"And yet I have seen you waste an immense amount of superfluous admiration, which would have been far better bestowed on me, on the wild flowers we gather in the hedges."

“Ah! wild flowers, that’s quite different; why, there are no flowers so beautiful as wild flowers. Think of wood anemones and garden ones, will you venture to compare then, sir? or snowdrops either; and look at that nosegay of dog-roses and ferns, that I gathered this morning; will you find anything to beat its freshness and elegance?”

“Well, it does look tasty, but that owes something to the arrangement, I fancy; but if you placed a hothouse bouquet beside it, the want of bright colouring in your wild friends would make them dowdy.”

Before Lucy could utter her indignant remonstrance there was a ring at the surgery-bell.

“Poor darling, and so tired as you are,” said Lucy, tenderly; “I thought I was going to have you to myself this evening. I shall just go and see who it is, for I believe James went out after you came home, and if it’s nothing of consequence I shall make whoever it is wait till he comes back; he’s sure not to be long.”

But after a short parley, Jacob heard her returning and evidently not alone; heavy hobnails sounded on the uncarpeted floor, Lucy

having left the inner door, which shut the surgery from the house, ajar.

She came in smiling, followed by Peter Stasson.

“It’s only Peter, dear, so I thought he could come in here without disturbing you.” She gathered up her needlework and went away.

Peter was a much healthier looking man now ; he had less hard work to do and more to eat—enough to make any one look healthier, perhaps. By Hester’s express desire, as has been said, he had been appointed head man at Kirton’s Farm under the occasional superintendence of Mr. Goldsmith, with much better wages than Farmer Kirton had ever paid him ; and now, spite of his wife’s shiftless ways, her superior schooling became of service ; they occupied part of the farmhouse, and were able to send the children to school in the daytime, so that by evening she was no longer an over-worked, weary woman, but able to help Peter with his farming accounts, which Mr. Goldsmith inspected rigorously once a month.

He had come up now to get some medicine for the pain in his back left by the fever.

Jacob prescribed the necessary remedies, and

gave him what medicine he required, and after asking a few questions about the children, he hoped Peter would depart; but the man lingered.

"What is it, Peter? can I do anything else for you?"

"Well, doctor, I do want a word more wi' ye. Folks ha' been a-tellin' I that Muss Heaster be a-comin' for to stay along o' you and yur missus; and I ——"

"You want to know when she's coming? Well then, Peter,—for the present not at all; she cannot leave London just now; in fact, I don't expect we shall see her in this part of the world for a long time to come."

"Ye'll excuse me, doctor, but Mr. Goldsmith, when he wur down at farm, he seemed to think us shouldn't bide there much longer; he said us must turn out soon to make room for Muss Heaster and her good man."

"What! did he say they were going to live at Kirton's Farm? Impossible," said Mr. Bonham, surprised and annoyed out of all self-possession.

"Well, doctor, he didn't quite as much as say for good-an-all," said Peter. "My mussus's notion wur that thay be thinkin' o' comin' for

the summer-time loike, and real hearty us'll all be to see Muss Heaster again, God bless her!"

"Well, good-night, Peter. If I were you, I wouldn't set my heart upon her coming; I've no belief Mr. Goldsmith was in earnest, or if he were, there's no saying Mr. Hallam may be of the same way of thinking; I don't think Kirton's Farm would suit his notions."

"There bean't no love lost atween the doctor and Muss Heaster's good man, I'm thinkin'," said quiet, observant Peter to himself, as he trudged back to Kirton's Farm.

Jacob Bonham stood in the surgery, thinking over what he had just heard, and confused with the mental tumult in his mind the news had created. He felt that it would be most injurious to his peace, would perhaps destroy all his domestic happiness, if the Hallams took up their permanent residence at Kirton's Farm. He was sure he could never like Frederic Hallam or make a companion of him; besides, he was just the sort of man who would patronize, and patronage was to Jacob, with all his easy *débonnaire* ways, what it is to most right-minded men, insufferable. Then Hester, he knew, did not love his Lucy as

she deserved, and if they had to meet often, and as neighbours they would do so, he could not suffer his darling's feelings to be hurt by slights and coldness. But he would not believe they were coming to the farm. Jacob was not the only man who has hesitated to give credit to what he does not wish to happen; no doubt Mr. Goldsmith had not spoken decidedly—a story never loses in the telling—and Mr. and Mrs. Hallam might be quite unconscious of any intention of revisiting the farm.

At any rate the best and kindest way was not to tell Lucy what Peter had said—she would be sure to write to Hester and urge her to come—and after the slighting way in which their invitation had been treated, there was no need that she should write to her cousin at all.

He was surprised not to feel quite calm and easy when he had made this determination. Was it because this was the first secret he had ever kept from his wife? But her smiling face, when she came downstairs again, soon chased away the cloud of disquiet.

Perhaps it was a pity she came so soon; if the cloud had swelled and blackened, the lightning

ray of truth might have darted from it, and have helped him, by its momentary brilliance, to analyse his motives more closely than he was in the habit of doing, for good as Jacob was, he was not very earnest-minded as yet.

One of his unconfessed causes of dislike to the Hallams and their influence over Lucy was, that, beside the husband, he feared to feel awkward and country-bred; and another reason, that his independence revolted from the acquaintance of those so much richer than himself. He was not afraid of feeling envy of their riches, but he had disliked inviting them to his house, lest they might think he was courting them for the sake of their wealth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EVE OF THE STORM.

HESTER was really dull and lonely; she had begged her husband so earnestly to send her news of his safe arrival at Tatton, that she had received a few hastily written lines the morning after his departure, but two whole days had gone by since then, and there were still two more to be passed alone.

She was pained and surprised, too, at not hearing from Lucy. Jacob wronged Hester when he thought her insensible to her cousin's affection; she had not cared much for it before her marriage; jealousy of Lucy's superior advantages and education had often made her repel her demonstrative love; but then her whole nature was lethargic and undeveloped. Now that she had known what it was to love herself, she felt grateful when she reflected on Lucy's fondness, and had resolved on

a different line of conduct towards her, when she should be once more at Kirton's Farm. But as day after day went by, and no answer came, she grew anxious and unhappy. Too proud and reserved to risk the chance of a rebuff by writing again, she told herself that, after all, Lucy's was a shallow nature. Many people, besides Hester, seem to think there can be no depth, and only evanescent warmth, in an impulsive temperament, forgetting that this is a physical rather than a mental attribute, and may be found united to the most unswerving constancy.

Hester had been jealous of Lucy formerly, but not of her love for her; it had been so plainly shown, so freely given, that she assumed it as a personal right. She had not thought enough of it to doubt it. But now her jealousy took another direction; Lucy's love for her own husband had made her selfish; she had merely asked her to Stedding as a formal compliment—did not care, in fact, whether she went there or not; if she had been still the Lucy of old times, she would have written an ardent outpouring of regret, when she received Hester's letter.

There may be, and doubtless are, much bitterer

feelings ; but human nature is wrenched severely when an unexpected defection of this kind forces itself on our conviction. We think ourselves—nay, have abundant proof—that we are loved, petted, almost idolized, by the admiring reverence of a friend, for whom (sometimes, because we have an innate, although unconscious, shrinking from a shallower nature than our own, oftener perhaps, because our hearts are otherwise occupied) we do not feel an equally warm affection ; we are content with loving them ; they are our friends for life, dearer perhaps than any, except wife, or husband, or child. Suddenly, how or why, we know not, we wake to the certainty that we are dethroned. It is not like the treachery or the coldness of our nearest and dearest, the one who shares our heart of hearts—for I do not believe there is room for more than one in its inmost recesses—but still it is bitter : the shock to self-love is as great as that to affection ; we are discrowned ; our smiles, our opinions, are no longer valued ; we did not know till we lost it, how dear all this was.

One calls this *désillusion*—one gets used to it as one grows older, but it is a heart-hardening process.

Beyond the unsatisfied feeling about her husband, which had been growing so much stronger of late, this defection of Lucy's was really Hester's first lesson in life's deceits; it seemed as if she had lost something that was hers of right, and she looked upon Jacob Bonham as a thief who had stolen away her cousin's love. It seemed doubly cruel when she was feeling lonely and deserted without her husband. If Fred had only taken her to Stedding all would have been right between her and Lucy; and now, by the time they went to live at Kirton's Farm (for she still hoped for this), Lucy would be perfectly indifferent whether she ever saw her again. She could not write—it would be mean and cringeing to beg for an affection that was plainly on the wane; besides, what good would come of it; it might make Lucy hypocritical; she might profess what she could no longer feel, rather than seem unkind—no, she would not write.

But this resolution made Hester harder and older. Self-dependence rarely softens a woman, and her husband was included in this change of feeling.

She wondered if other husbands left their wives

to be as dreary and lonely as she was. Certainly in this instance it was her own doing. She had refused to go to Wilton Place, and that same morning she had walked out with her maid in the Regent's Park, and as she returned saw that Mrs. Hallam's carriage had just driven up to her door; without deigning any explanation to Parkins, she walked quickly up the street again, nor turned till she felt sure the unwelcome visitor must have driven away.

"She did not come from kindness," said Hester proudly, to herself; "she only came to pry into how I employ my time in Fred's absence. I should wish her to think that I go out and amuse myself; it will show her I am quite independent of her, and give her something to talk about."

She thought to herself that no one, not even Fred, knew how diligently she had been turning to account the many solitary hours she had passed, in hard work for her French and Italian masters. She was taking lessons in German, too, but she knew her husband did not care about travelling in Germany, and therefore she was more desirous of perfecting herself in Italian, in the

hope that they might revisit Rome, although her own choice would have led her to the more difficult language; perhaps she would have enjoyed the conquest over its grammar more thoroughly than she would have appreciated its literary treasures; as yet, she preferred learning to reading. But who does not enjoy the development of a new faculty? It is not vanity—but it is among the most exquisite of purely human sensations, to make acquaintance, as it were, with this stranger in one's own mind—to see it struggling into life, daily growing in strength, finally walking alone, and dragging us along with it, forced in some mysterious, incomprehensible manner to set it free—to give it utterance. The intellectual part of Hester's memory till now had scarcely been tried; it was delightful to her to find how much it could retain. She began to speak French more than correctly now—with elegance; her pronunciation improved daily, but her accent was faulty and monotonous; her keen intelligence told her that a few months' residence in Paris among French people would do more for this than any teaching, now that she was such a proficient in the language, although her professor shook his head, and hinted that unless

this was attempted at a much earlier age, it would be useless.

Hester was resolute. She knew she should never be a musician or an artist, but she was determined to excel in something.

This morning her resolves had taken a more definite form. She had found, on her return from her walk, a few lines from her aunt Wrenshaw, telling her that she and her husband were on the eve of starting for Paris, where they intended to stay some months, as they had let their house and furniture to a friend.

Oh ! if Fred would only take her to Paris in the autumn, as he had once promised he would, how intensely happy her life would be ! She should be able to talk French all day long, for he would be sure to make some acquaintances, and then if he went out and left her, instead of being dull and lonely as she was now, her aunt would always be within reach. She smiled at herself the next minute : aunt Wrenshaw lived in London, and yet they never met. Probably Hester felt by instinct, what so many people experience in reality, that a singular amount of sympathy and liking will spring up between those who meet on

foreign ground, though they never dreamed of being even companionable on their own soil.

Perhaps the separation of his wife from her aunt had been almost as great a mistake of Frederic Hallam's as his marriage—she would have been Hester's good genius. She would at any rate have spared her those hours of self-communion, so unprofitable when bent earthwards. She would have given her the love her heart was secretly, though unconsciously, pining for, and would have prevented the scorching process it was now undergoing, and which a strong unelastic nature rarely recovers from.

But Hester had not much leisure to meditate this afternoon. Her French master was coming at three o'clock, for a two hours' lesson. She was working extra hard in Fred's absence from home, and this afternoon she became so interested in the course of study planned for the next two days, that she hurried through dinner, resolved to work all the evening.

So absorbed had she become in composing a French letter to her husband, that she did not hear a knock at the street-door, nor feet on the stairs, and she started in great surprise, when the

drawing-room door was thrown open, and Captain Fortescue was announced.

She blushed brightly as she rose to welcome him; there had been no possibility of hiding her books and dictionary, so he must know her secret. She had considered herself so perfectly free from evening visitors during Fred's absence.

A flush came into Captain Fortescue's face also, and he did not look as self-possessed as usual; but Hester was so intent upon securing his secrecy that she did not observe it.

He apologized for such an intrusion, but Mr. Hallam had asked him to deliver a message—personally.

The colour died out of Hester's cheeks; she began to fear her husband was ill; but she did not speak.

"He sends his love; he is quite well, and will perhaps stay away some days longer."

"I expected Mr. Hallam the day after to-morrow," she said, abruptly.

She felt angry with Fortescue, it seemed to her that she ought to have been written to instead of him.

"And you are very much disappointed, I fear. You must be dull so much alone."

"Oh, no," said Hester; she could not bear pity even from Captain Fortescue. "Of course I miss my husband greatly; but you see I have plenty to do in his absence;" she pointed to her books.

Fortescue looked as if he did not understand; and Hester, after enjoining him not to betray her secret, told him how she spent her lonely hours, and how anxious she was to surprise her husband with her progress.

He listened in astonishment and admiration: at her age, with her attractions, to have the resolution and self-denial to forego all lighter occupation and recreation, and work as hard as a school-girl, and for what? to gratify and surprise a man who had no love for her, and who would not appreciate the sacrifice.

He did not reply; he was musing over his friend's indifference to so much loving devotion.

Till now he had fancied Hester cold, but the warm light in her eyes and the eager flush on her cheeks betrayed her love for her husband to be far deeper than he had ever suspected.

The revelation irritated him, he scarcely knew why; he had insensibly grown to fancy himself necessary to Hester's happiness, and yet her

thoughts were not with him now. How could she be so slavish as to bestow affection where it was neither valued nor returned? Surely, if she showed a little spirit and resentment, Fred might be brought back to his duty.

He felt the ardent desire we experience, when we hear a thoroughly undeserving person praised, to undeceive Mrs. Hallam, to open her eyes to the truth, or rather, to the falsehood of her husband's conduct towards her,—but how could he speak of such things to a wife? He had scarcely ever felt so contradictory. Must he let her go on in blindness, lavishing all her love where it was so completely wasted?

Hester looked up, surprised at his continued silence.

“But, perhaps, you think I am not making any progress,” she said, doubtfully, for Fortescue still held a page of French manuscript in his hand; “and, perhaps, he will not think so either.”

Fortescue laid the paper down with an impatient gesture; he could scarcely restrain himself from speaking out.

“I should not think it of much consequence what Hallam thinks about it.”

"Why not? I don't understand you," said Hester, her head thrown back, and her eyes fixed on him with a look of dignified surprise.

"I meant—that—that as he is not certainly so good a French scholar as you must be by this time, his judgment cannot much signify. He is not much of a linguist, I believe." Fortescue reddened, and spoke with hesitation.

His manner puzzled her. She had thought he loved Fred almost as well as she did; it was the first time any one had ventured to speak disparagingly of her husband, and her indignation was roused. But Hester rarely spoke or acted upon impulse. Captain Fortescue's words meant more than they implied; his manner had been strangely variable, and he had seemed ill at ease. Perhaps Fred had quarrelled with him, but then he would not have made him the bearer of a message from him. At any rate, she did not choose to hear him find fault with her husband.

"What is the matter, Captain Fortescue? is there any—anything wrong between you and Fred? You are the last person I should have expected to blame him."

Fortescue's pride was now roused by her harsh

abrupt manner; he saw he had displeased her, but she had chosen him, or he considered that she had chosen him, for her friend and adviser, and he must justify his words. Her cold, stern, expectant look gave him little time to reason with himself.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hallam," he said, very seriously, "there has not been any quarrel between your husband and myself, although I have taken upon me to remonstrate with him lately about his conduct."

"His conduct," repeated Hester to herself, so overcome by surprise at his daring as to have no power of answering readily.

"Mrs. Hallam, you have honoured me with your friendship, or I should shrink from saying this.—I have remonstrated with your husband, as his intimate friend, about his neglect of so good and loving a wife as you are. I have seen it with the greatest pain."

She stood speechless; every right and true feeling warring against what she felt to be an unwarrantable interference, and above all prevailed deep, intense mortification that he should have seen and commented on what her heart too sorely told her was the truth.

There was a dead silence.

At length Hester spoke; but her words came slowly at first, as if she were lost in thought.

“What business is it of yours, Captain Fortescue?” she said; all the old unpolished abruptness of her early girlhood returning in this moment of intense feeling, rendered harsher still, perhaps, by the strong curb she was yet able to maintain over the passionate anger that was fast rising. “No one asked you to interfere between me and Mr. Hallam; and I beg you will not call yourself my friend. I do not want a friend who speaks against my husband when he is away. It is not friendship either, but impertinence, to speak as you have done.”

Fortescue was too self-convicted, too deeply mortified with himself, to attempt a reply; he gave one glance at Hester, whose darkening face was fixed on the door, as if to show her eagerness for his departure, and quietly bowing he left her alone.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT HAPPENED AT TATTON.

It was not altogether from indifference that Frederic Hallam had not written again to his wife.

When he started on that Monday morning, all looked bright and promising, so far as the weather and the equipment of the drag were concerned, and he was in high spirits; but when the party reached the railway station, he was annoyed to find a man waiting with a note from Mr. Faulkner, stating that he and one of his friends, the only two members of the set with whom Hallam was on intimate terms, and with whom he cared to associate, would not be able to accompany them to Tatton.

An undefined feeling of dislike and distrust of the rest of the party gathered in his mind as he looked at them, and he had half a mind to withdraw; and when two "horsey"-looking men, with bullet-

heads scantily covered with hair, and cheeks like a quarenden apple, presented themselves as friends of the others, and candidates for the places left vacant by Faulkner's defection, he felt still more reluctant to trust himself alone in such company. But the heavy risk depending on the race, faith in his own sharpness, and his sense of good-fellowship, prevailed; nor could he well draw back now. Moreover, once at Tatton, he might easily find more congenial associates, and probably—here a bright idea occurred to his inventive mind, always on the look-out for expedients—there would be something to be learned worth knowing from the set he was among at present.

So lighting his cigar, and casting care to the winds, he was soon deep in conversation with one of the apple-cheeked personages above mentioned.

As soon as they had reached Tatton station, and were again mounted on their vehicle, for the course was some distance from the railway, they found themselves in the thronged road always to be found in the vicinity of "the races."

Among the numerous carriages filled with fair and fashionably dressed ladies that they passed on their way, he recognized Lady Helena Fortescue.

She looked first surprised, and then pleased—unmistakably pleased—Hallam fancied, to see him, and he returned her bow with *empressement* and his winning smile.

She was really pleased to see him again; he had not kept his promise of calling on her, so that she had fancied he was going to shut himself up till the awkward, over-grown country girl he had married—for she knew she was this—was polished and presentable. She had never forgotten the first account her brother-in-law had given her of Hallam's marriage; that it was one of purely mercenary motives. Fortescue had not seen her alone since; no one ever had much opportunity of seeing Lady Helena alone in the height of the London season, and even if he had, he would have been chary of praising Hester to her; she could not tolerate praise of any woman too young to be her grandmother, and something made him dread the ridicule with which she would have met his admiration of a country-bred girl.

Lady Helena had felt secretly pleased to see Hallam alone at the theatre; but then he had evaded her inquiry after his wife, by saying she had another engagement; this was, of course,

possible; still, although Lady Helena was not likely to encourage the admiration of a married man, it was pleasant to her self-love, that, after having admired her, he had not lost his taste so sadly, as to be in love with his country wife; and his being at the races alone was a proof of this; at any rate, his coming to Tatton a day beforehand was suspicious evidence. She was staying with friends in the neighbourhood, and should therefore, in all probability, see a good deal of Mr. Hallam during the race week.

But to her surprise, she did not see him again, either that day or the next, although she visited the race-course; but, on the third day, the great day of the races, she suddenly saw him among the gentlemen on a drag which had lately placed itself beside her carriage.

He returned her bow, far more gravely and coldly than the last time; but she was determined he should speak to her, and she beckoned him round to the other side, so that she could talk without being overheard.

He obeyed the summons, though he showed no haste in doing so, and had nothing to say when he came.

"You look grave and sad, Mr. Hallam; I hope you have no cause for anxiety."

Hallam laughed, but in a forced, unnatural way.

"You know, Lady Helena, we men have something more serious at stake, when the Tatton Cup is run for, than a few pairs of gloves."

"I ought to know it," she said, looking pointedly at her husband, who was sitting on the box-seat, eagerly studying a note he held in his hand; "if there were no Tatton Cup, Mr. Hallam, it might be much better for Mr. Gerald Fortescue. You are a lucky man; you see I only brought my husband an empty title, whereas your wife is said to have filled your purse; and also seems to give you full leave to empty it without her supervision. *I* should not trust *my* husband alone at Tatton Races," and then she laughed unpleasantly.

Her words and manner were equally annoying. Why need she talk of his wife at all? he had never mentioned her of his own accord, and her allusion to the money was in very bad taste.

"I don't suppose Mrs. Hallam cares about the races," he said, carelessly; "at any rate, she is

much better at home;” then looking towards his friends, he said, “if you will excuse me, I must say good-day; I see I am waited for,” and raising his hat, without even waiting for the hand-shaking he would once have so much valued, he returned to his seat, nor did he again look round at Lady Helena during the remainder of the day.

I have said before enough to intimate that she was not a woman to make an enemy of, and now she was very angry. That she had brought Hallam’s reply on herself by her covert impertinence, was nothing. Lady Helena was not likely to judge herself severely; there is no knowing what secret understanding she maintained with her conscience, but even her husband had never heard her own herself in the wrong; perhaps, she thought that with so weak and, at the same time, so stubborn a mind as Gerald Fortescue’s, if she once betrayed consciousness of a flaw in the harness in which she held him, he might snap it beyond her power of readjustment.

Now she looked beautifully terrible in her anger. That a nobody like Mr. Hallam, and one who had degraded himself by a *mésalliance*, should dare to bandy words with her, to administer

reproof to her, for he had almost said Tatton race-course was not a fit place for ladies, was not to be endured. His subsequent contemptuous indifference to her presence deepened the insult—neglect was a thing she never pardoned—and as it left her no immediate means of vengeance, her anger rankled into hatred. There could be only one reason for Hallam's behaviour—he *was* in love with his awkward country-bred wife after all—and to the wound his contradiction had inflicted was added the deeper sting to her imperious vanity, that another woman's influence should enable any man so completely to resist hers, although she were his wife.

She would be revenged on them both. She wondered what sort of creature this could be, who, married only for her money, was yet able to fascinate a man whose taste had been refined by the society of such a woman as herself.

"She must have some power and strength of will, too," mused Lady Helena; "mere prettiness and good-nature would not subjugate Mr. Hallam. It would be too much trouble, or I should like to show her how changeable he is. I wonder what she is like."

And then she went on pondering the possibility of Mrs. Hallam being aware that her husband had not married her for love. If she were of a strong decided nature, such a revelation would surely cut short the domestic felicity she seemed to be enjoying. Lady Helena hated shams, and there was no sham so absurd as that of people who affected a turtle-dove fondness six months after marriage. Why did she and Mr. Fortescue live on such excellent terms? Simply because they saw so little of each other, and because there had never from the first been any nonsense between them. She was one of those women—one hopes they are rare, although there are such—who never reason under provocation, or make the slightest effort towards self-government; but only, like fabled furies, lash themselves into something nearly resembling madness, with the snaky coils of passion, pride, and self-will, no matter how small the provocation. Lady Helena's fiat had gone forth, that her will was to be sovereign law to all around her. She had willed, almost unconsciously, to retain the admiration of Frederic Hallam, and to ignore the existence of his wife; and now that he should not only dare to slight her, but to hold up

that wife's example as one she might do well to follow—for so she had interpreted his reply—was an offence to be signally revenged, and she threw herself back in her carriage to meditate on the means.

Hallam meanwhile was plunged in gloomy thought; if Lady Helena had not been too angry she might have considered that his serious face and captious behaviour were hardly those of a happy husband.

During the two days that he had passed in the society of his new acquaintances, the younger of them had so ingratiated himself by his simplicity and off-handed frankness of manner, that Hallam had given up all idea of joining another party on the race-course. This man, who was, he imagined, far more wealthy than he seemed, had offered in a lazy sleepy way to take such large odds against a horse, that his companion asserted to be far more likely to win than either of the favourites, that Hallam, thrown off his guard, and forgetting all prudence in the prospect of so easy a harvest, risked far beyond the sum he had tried to extort from Goldsmith, and about which the lawyer had, to the last, declined making any definite promise.

And then she went on pondering the possibility of Mrs. Hallam being aware that her husband had not married her for love. If she were of a strong decided nature, such a revelation would surely cut short the domestic felicity she seemed to be enjoying. Lady Helena hated shams, and there was no sham so absurd as that of people who affected a turtle-dove fondness six months after marriage. Why did she and Mr. Fortescue live on such excellent terms? Simply because they saw so little of each other, and because there had never from the first been any nonsense between them. She was one of those women—one hopes they are rare, although there are such—who never reason under provocation, or make the slightest effort towards self-government; but only, like fabled furies, lash themselves into something nearly resembling madness, with the snaky coils of passion, pride, and self-will, no matter how small the provocation. Lady Helena's fiat had gone forth, that her will was to be sovereign law to all around her. She had willed, almost unconsciously, to retain the admiration of Frederic Hallam, and to ignore the existence of his wife; and now that he should not only dare to slight her, but to hold up

that wife's example as one she might do well to follow—for so she had interpreted his reply—was an offence to be signally revenged, and she threw herself back in her carriage to meditate on the means.

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But then Hallam had argued there was no risk in what he was doing ; in fact, unless the very worst luck befell him, it was certain gain, and would richly cover any losses he might incur on his first ventures. But on the morning of this day, a few words of a whispered conversation, accidentally overheard, had made him anxious. He looked hard at the speakers ; there could be no mistake about them ; they were his two apple-cheeked acquaintances. It was quite plain from what they had said, that they were acting unfairly by some one ; but when he went up to them suddenly, they seemed in no way confused, and the excessive cordiality of their greeting convinced him that *he* was not to be the victim of their schemes.

“ It’s in the nature of these men,” he thought, “ to live on the ill-luck and mistakes of their fellows ; it’s their trade, in fact ; but then I believe they are to be trusted sometimes, and when they are, of course their information is worth having. I know enough of human nature to be sure it was nothing but contradiction, because his friend and I praised up Sunbeam last night, that made that fellow Triggs take such odds against him. I believe I’m safe to win.”

Still with all this plausible satisfactory reasoning, he was very anxious and restless; if—and he scarcely dared to face the if—he lost, he should be completely in Goldsmith's power, and his pride revolted from the idea of applying to his mother or his aunt; besides, how could they help him? These debts, supposing they should prove so, must be paid at once, and how could any such feeble aid as theirs liquidate so vast an amount?

But Care and Frederic Hallam never could consort for long together, and he was soon eagerly excited in watching the start, which was some time in accomplishing.

At last the horses were fairly off.

It seemed an instant—and then where was Sunbeam? He strained his eyes eagerly over the course; the horse was emphatically “no-where;” but he saw her come in lame, some time after all was over.

The whole scene spun round before Hallam's eyes; he had lost before, but then he had never made so fearful a venture: still he would not abandon hope altogether; the other horse that was to run for the Beechwood stakes in the afternoon

must win; he knew all about that; and in his excitement he positively increased the odds he had taken in its favour.

His two new friends had said in the morning they were pledged to join another party at dinner-time, and Hallam felt relieved by their absence. Whether he had been duped or not, his simple-looking friend had certainly had the best of it. It gave him an aguish feeling when he thought how triumphantly Goldsmith would sneer. He would look upon him as a mere boy not fit to be trusted with money. But why need he be beholden to Goldsmith in the matter? could he not raise the sum he wanted on the security of his wife's inheritance? But, then, that inheritance was so entirely in the lawyer's hands, and had been kept such a secret, that he scarcely saw how this was to be effected without Goldsmith's knowledge, and in that case he might as well go to him direct.

The unusual worry and annoyance were telling upon him, and when dinner-time came, he drank far more than he was accustomed to, in the hope of reviving his flagging spirits.

They did revive almost madly, and then came

the excitement of the race in which he had so deep an interest.

He was not dull or care-worn now.

Even Lady Helena as she glanced up, spite of her angry feelings towards him, was obliged to confess how very handsome, how animated he looked, as bending eagerly forward he stood, watch in hand, his eyes strained in a fixed gaze on the horse on which now his fate depended.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FENCING MATCH.

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE, as he walked home after his interview with Hester, did not feel that it was himself that his legs were carrying. Surely he had been bewitched, transformed into some one else. That he, fastidious, almost over-strained, in his delicacy about interfering in the affairs of others, should by some strange fatality or glamour, as it now seemed to him, have been led to utter so gross an impertinence to a wife—it was the first error he could ever remember to have committed against good-breeding. What could have prompted him, or rather what power was it that had dragged the words to his tongue? for it had seemed to him that against his actual will he had been forced to speak of Hester's husband.

And what end had it served?

It had mortified and degraded him in his own

eyes and in hers. Instead of giving the good advice which he thought she really needed in order to secure better treatment from such a man as Hallam, he had just said enough to make her miserable; for if she were happy and contented with her lot—and what right had he to suppose, when he recalled the expression of her eyes when she talked of surprising her husband, that she was not?—he had shown her that others saw what she did not feel, and must have occasioned her the keenest mortification. The belief that he had given Hester pain was more intolerable than the remembrance of his own unwarrantable behaviour. He felt that he could not meet her again with any composure for some time to come; he did not know why, but the longing for her society seemed to have passed away, now that it was evident his was not necessary to her happiness.

By degrees, as his self-love recovered from the shock he had himself administered, he began to reflect upon Hester's conduct in the matter, and decided that she had been very very rude and coarse in her way of speaking to him, and that, however fascinating she might be, she certainly was not a lady.

Why not avoid all chance of seeing her again? The season would soon be over now; he was tired of London already; why need he wait? he had plenty of country invitations, some from people who rarely visited London at all, and therefore would be especially glad of his presence when all their neighbours had deserted them. He had scarcely ever seen the country in June; he thought it must be very charming and refreshing after the dust and heat of London.

He was surprised the next day to receive a note from Lady Helena; he read it twice over before he could recover himself, and then he was as much at a loss as ever to guess its true meaning, yet if a stranger had read it, he would not have remarked anything worthy of wonder in its simple wording.

It was a request to her brother-in-law, to call on her in the course of the day, as she so much wanted to talk to him about Tatton races.

"I wonder what she really does want? Tatton races, too!" thought Percy Fortescue, as he prepared, as soon as the afternoon cooled, to obey her summons; "fortunately for my complaisance, I have an engagement within two or three doors

of Gerald's, or I fear I should not have obeyed her ladyship so punctually."

Helena Fortescue had never before made herself so agreeable to her brother-in-law.

She was pleased and surprised with his ready compliance. She had feared he would, with his usual penetration, have suspected some hidden motive in her request. To say truth, Captain Fortescue was perhaps, in general, less courteous to his sister-in-law than to any other lady of his acquaintance; and this not because she was his sister-in-law—he was so real a gentleman, that he would have thought this gave her an additional claim on his good-breeding—but because he saw that she did not make Gerald happy, and that she was an extravagant and heartless woman.

Besides, as he had never paid her any of the worship she lived for, she had never tried to make herself fascinating to him, and he was not a fair judge of her powers of pleasing; true in this case, as in so many others, that if we do not take the trouble to unfold our best qualities to our fellows, theirs will be hermetically sealed up from us for ever.

But whether, as has been said, his ready call pleased her, or that, for some reason she really wished for his good opinion, she was thoroughly cordial and sisterly.

She gave so vivid and animated an account of the races, that Fortescue was greatly amused, and quite entered into the ludicrous picture she drew of some of the scenes she had witnessed.

Presently Fortescue asked her if she saw Hallam there.

"Yes, I ~~saw~~ him," said Lady Helena, "and I was sorry to see him there without his wife."

"I can account for that: he told me he was pledged to go with a set of rather fast men; it would not have been at all the sort of society for her to have been mixed up with."

"Oh, I fancied, from the story you told me about your friend's marriage, that she was probably a person he would not much care to be seen in public with." She spoke with a smiling indifference.

"I had not then seen her, and I believe, Helena," he added, forcing a laugh to hide the discomfiture he felt, that she should have broached so painful a topic, "you and I have both lived long enough

in the world to be aware, that what is said by the omnipotent and ubiquitous *they* is not always to be depended on. I have often thought," he went on, "that it might be useful, and amusing also, to book all that the immortal 'they' is reported to have uttered on any given topic; it would probably be found that the list contained innumerable words, actions, and motives, which the persons mentioned or accused would truly plead as being among 'Things not generally known' to them."

Lady Helena smiled, but she ~~was~~ not to be diverted from her purpose.

"The story was false, then, and it is entirely a marriage of affection?"

She tried to compel truth out of him by her earnest fixed look, but he had turned away—he did not care to meet her eyes just then—and affected to be deep in the examination of a piece of old china on the table. Had he noticed her eager, passionate expression, he would have been more guarded in his answer.

"I never yet asked Mrs. Hallam the question, but she is charming enough to command the love of any man."

Helena trembled visibly, between anger and

impatience to hear more. Still he did not look at her, and she was obliged to say something to continue the subject.

“I am more and more surprised. From his manner one would scarcely have imagined him so very *devoted* a husband;” and then she threw down her eyes, for she saw Fortescue start, and could not quite brave his look at that moment. How easily a falsehood is suggested by a conscious look—a timid manner—while the strongest asseveration, where the face is not dressed in fitting livery, fails to convince!

Captain Fortescue at once imagined that Hallam still cherished his former admiration, and had resumed the homage he had formerly paid to his sister-in-law, and, although he knew her too well to dread that she would give him any serious encouragement, it grieved him that Hester was wronged by any devotion shown by her husband to another woman.

He felt angry with Helena, and determined to mortify her triumphant vanity.

“Men do not generally parade their affection for their wives,” he said, with an irrepressible sneer. “But what I am telling you now, Helena,

you may rely on as true. Mrs. Frederic Hallam is the loveliest woman I ever saw, and is as clever and fascinating as she is beautiful." He felt a double pleasure in saying this.

He looked keenly at her, but her woman's wit had guessed his intention. She was used to fencing matches with Percy Fortescue, and, except a slight movement of the lower jaw, her face was calmed and unmoved — her eyes bent on the ground.

"Why did you not tell me this before?" she said; "you give me quite an anxiety to see this paragon. I shall insist that Mr. Hallam brings his wife to see me."

"You would not judge her favourably, I think, at first sight; she is shy with strangers. You had better ask her to your next reception, Helena," he went on, feeling that the best way of preventing any intimacy with Hester would be to arouse dread of her rival charms; "she would make a sensation, I can tell you."

Spite of her rigid self-control, the light flashed from her eyes now. But she was determined he should not see that she was jealous of a country girl.

"Ah! very likely, but I don't intend to give another reception this season," she said, languidly. "Gerald's ill-luck at Tatton has settled that question. But where do your friends live? They have a house of their own by this time, I suppose."

"No, they have not,—they are still in lodgings." He felt strangely unwilling to tell her where Hester lived, yet it was an absurd reticence, as if such a woman as Helena would care to make the acquaintance of one out of her "set," and, moreover, younger and more beautiful than she was.

"Ah! then you need not tell me. I remember you said before, No. 60, Gloucester Place."

He set her right as to the number, which, by the way, she had guessed at; for in her now settled desire to see Hester, she dreaded lest innumerable obstacles should come in her way. Probably if her brother-in-law had evaded the question, her quick intelligence would soon have obtained the clue she sought, and which she knew was not to be found in the Court Guide.

"I think," she said, throwing herself back on her sofa, with what really was a sigh of relief

from the severe mental effort she had maintained, but which she meant to express weariness, "that this country lady should feel highly flattered by the length of time we have been discussing her; if you were not so impenetrably indifferent, Percy, I should begin to suspect you admired her yourself. But now tell me what you think of my new purchase, which I see you have been examining so attentively."

He nearly let the china fall. Her words sounded so like irony, and yet they were aimed at random, merely to glide gracefully to some other topic, without giving him any suspicion of the real subject of her meditations.

He soon after found an excuse for leaving; it seemed as if every moment she might make some fresh allusion to Hester, and he wished to avoid the pain it caused him. He felt troubled and anxious enough as it was. If he could have seen Helena a few moments after he left her, he would perhaps have regretted his praise of another woman's beauty, and have thought that the cloud on his spirits was one of those mysterious warnings so often sent to us as the herald of coming storm.

His sister-in-law had succeeded in one point. She had so completely discomfited and disturbed him, that he quite forgot to wonder afresh what had been her object in seeking this interview.

CHAPTER XIV.

HESTER'S VISITOR.

It is difficult to describe the effect Fortescue's words had produced on Hester; she would have found it difficult herself to say which was the feeling that reigned uppermost of the throng that now agitated her mind beyond any power of will to quiet.

Perhaps the strongest, at any rate the most vehement, was proud anger against Captain Fortescue. His interference and his suspicions were as unjustifiable as the slighting manner in which he had spoken of her husband. No, nothing could be so bad as that; how dared he—he to whom Fred was always so kind, so full of praise and friendship? And then—for she still loved her husband dearly; she was still partially blind to his faults—she compared him mentally

with Captain Fortescue, and thought how in every way Fred was his superior. She had had too little of her husband's society to find out his intellectual deficiencies, since her newly awakened powers had enabled her to prize and estimate truly what she would have called scholarship. She believed Fortescue to be mean and jealous; the truth was, he envied Fred his frank light-heartedness, his power of diffusing merriment at will. She did not go farther and inquire the reason of his jealousy; as yet she was free from vanity, and she was too angry to think about him at all, except in regard to his rudeness.

She did not analyse her feelings sufficiently to know how much mortification had to do with her wrath. But as days wore on, and she grew calmer, her heart became more and more depressed; the future looked sadly blank and dreary. Spite of the assurances Fred had given her, it was strange and startling, that the thoughts and doubts which had been growing up so steadily in her mind should be uttered to her from without, by a person, too, who had been kinder to her than any one since her marriage, and who seemed to have forced himself, as it were,

out of his usual quiet gentleness to speak them at all.

Her eyes fell upon her books; would her husband care for all the labour and pains she had taken? She rose and paced the room impatiently: how could she bear this suspense?—Fred would not return for some days—and yet how could she speak to him of what his friend had said?

But she would not allow herself to continue in this state of doubt and agitation; she sate down determined to come to some decision as to her conduct to her husband.

It was not an easy matter: her thoughts were tangled and confused, as they had never been before; she began to think she would put off this wearying self-communion till next morning, and try for this afternoon to throw her mind again into her studies; but she disliked procrastination, it was foreign to her character, and she had just resolved to bend her rebellious will to its unwelcome task, when the sound of carriage-wheels rolling up to the door made her pause and listen.

The street door was opened before she could ring, or she would have refused to admit a visitor;

she only knew of Mrs. Hallam who would be likely to call on her in a carriage, and the rustling of silk on the staircase as the visitor mounted to the drawing-room, confirmed the belief.

She was surprised when Lady Helena Fortescue's card was brought down to her.

She felt really nervous now ; she had a secret dread and jealousy of this woman, whose manner Fred considered so perfect. She looked hesitatingly at her dress, a plain black silk, which, she feared, was perhaps not quite grand enough to see Lady Helena in. Had she been more self-conscious, she would have known that nothing could have set off her graceful figure and transparent skin to better advantage. She was very tall now, and as she threw back her head before she entered the drawing-room by way of asserting to herself her recovered self-possession, her cheek still flushed with excitement, she looked, as she advanced towards her, about the loveliest creature Helena Fortescue had ever seen.

She had thought and listened to Captain Fortescue's praise with much reservation, thinking it was intended to tease and vex her. She was mortified beyond endurance to find it exceeded by

the reality, and greeted Mrs. Hallam with the most reserved dignity.

"She had seen Mr. Hallam at the races; had had a good deal of talk with him there, and had thought his wife would like to hear that he seemed to be quite well and enjoying himself extremely. She supposed he had not yet returned."

More than one of the phrases of this speech annoyed Hester. She had no ready wit to thank Lady Helena for her thoughtfulness, and then turn the conversation to other things. She thought how very handsome she was, but how fierce looking, and that she certainly had a very disagreeable manner. So she said simply, but in her harsh abrupt way, in reply to the last words,

"No, I wish he would come home."

Lady Helena could smile now in superior pity, that so fair an outside should be coupled with so plebeian and unformed a manner. "Not a bit of *savoir faire* about her, I see," she said to herself. "A mere child, and I suppose he treats her as one. Where could he have found her?"

"You are not an exacting wife, I hope, Mrs. Hallam?" This was said with a tone and smile that roused Hester's pride, already sufficiently irritated

by her morning's meditations, to action. She pressed her lips firmly together, as Helena went on: "I am sure Mr. Hallam will return as soon as he possibly can."

What was her object in irritating Hester, for if she had studied her character for months, she could not probably have taken a surer way. She hardly knew how intense a feeling of dislike and jealousy this girl's loveliness had created within her. Fortescue's words had aroused her curiosity, although, as has been said, she scarcely believed them; and she thought it would be a fair revenge for Hallam's conduct to her at the races, to go and see his wife, whom she felt sure he was ashamed of, and wished to keep hidden; and if she found her, as she expected, a foolish, frightened country girl, she should amuse herself by making a little mischief, and letting her believe he had been very happy away from her.

Hester did not answer. She felt too angry to speak, but merely bowed her head.

"I am surprised," Lady Helena went on, "that you did not accompany him to the races. I assure you I think it is quite a wife's duty to go everywhere with her husband."

Hester raised her head, and looked at her unwaveringly. She did not understand why all this was said; only she felt that it was very insufferable, and must be stopped.

"I suppose," she said, with a calm determination that made the other look in wonder, "that husbands and wives have not always the same ideas about duties."

"Probably not; but, excuse me, I scarcely understand you."

"I mean that what may be your duty in regard to Mr. Fortescue, may not be mine towards my husband."

Lady Helena had never been spoken to so bluntly before in her life; her overbearing haughtiness and imperious temper had always prevented her from hearing the truth, and had Hester been less overwrought, she would have let her words pass without comment, although she might have wondered at their insolence.

Now she saw plainly, by the change in her companion's face, that she had worked some mighty mischief. Her eyes flashed, and she literally trembled with passion—passion, too, which might and must have vent; for who was there to

stay its utterance whose opinion was of the slightest value to her, and human opinion was the only self-controlling power Lady Helena's temper obeyed?

"You forget, Mrs. Hallam, that a far larger share of duty is due from you to your husband, than from others, to whom perhaps it is to be regretted you should have ventured to compare yourself."

Hester did not answer, but as Lady Helena rose from her seat, she rose also, as proud, as defiant, and far more self-possessed than her visitor.

They were about the same height, but Lady Helena's form was far more fully developed than Hester's, and there was a velvet-like ease in her movements, which the other as yet wanted. But still scarcely any one could have preferred the dark-browed, Eastern beauty of the one face to the pure, delicate, refined loveliness of the other.

"I don't know what you mean," said Hester, after a pause, feeling insulted and surprised at once: what was intended by this pointed reference to her husband?—"nor do I care to know," she continued, for she thought her visitor looked wicked, and she wished she would go.

"But you must know, I intend you to do so. I never speak in riddles that I cannot explain," said the other, with flashing eyes; "and I want to teach you, what it is a pity your own sense does not, that you should not have compared yourself with me. *I* was married for myself, not for my money."

Her eyes sparkled triumphantly, as she pronounced the last words with deliberate emphasis.

"How dare you insinuate what you know to be false?" exclaimed Hester, passionately, and she advanced a few steps towards her.

"It is no falsehood—it is the truth," said Helena Fortescue, fixing her eyes steadily on Hester's troubled face, in which she thought she saw the confirmation of her own words. "And now, good morning," she added, sweeping towards the door. "If you do not believe me, ask your husband when he returns,—dare him to contradict my words, and to say he married you because he loved you."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOLT FALLS.

HESTER could not have told how long she had been standing mute and motionless after Lady Helena's departure. In such a moment she might well question the reality of time, when all that made life real, worth possession to her, seemed gone—crushed out of her heart. She did not try to rouse herself from the dull, blank torpor that appeared to have paralyzed both mind and body; an inward dread of what the awakening would be kept her still, as if she feared the movement even of a finger might arouse her.

But this could not last, although, as sensation began to return, Hester wished that she could arrest it, that she could in any way end a life that now seemed to her unbearable.

Strange, that with her doubting, incredulous

mind, free from any imaginative or impulsive weaknesses, she should at once have received as truth the assertion of a stranger.

Alas! the ground was ready for the seed cast upon it.

But, as the power of thought returned, with a mighty effort of will, she arrested it; she walked deliberately up to the mantelpiece, and looked at the clock, then she rang the bell.

"Parkins, send for a cab, directly."

"Yes, ma'am; anything else, ma'am," said the woman, surprised out of her customary indifference. If her mistress was going to demean herself by riding in a cab, at least, she ought to accompany her; but Mrs. Hallam's stern "No," and injunction not to lose time, were so unlike any words she had ever heard from her before, that she obeyed in silence, convinced that some serious calamity had happened, and that Lady Helena Fortescue had been its messenger.

Hester was dressed to go out, when the maid tapped at her door.

"I do not want you, Parkins; you can go."

"There's nothing the matter, ma'am, I hope?" Parkins could no longer restrain herself.

“Nothing: you can go.”

But when the cab arrived, she lingered at the door, in the hope of hearing where Mrs. Hallam was bound to; for, of all things, she thought it most discreditable and improper for her mistress to go out driving alone in a cab so late in the afternoon; but she was disappointed, Mrs. Hallam only pointed with her finger the direction the man was to take, and then threw herself back, pulling down her veil.

As soon as the cab reached Oxford Street, she let down the front window, and touching the driver's arm, told him the address of Mr. Goldsmith's office. She had once heard her husband say, that the lawyer occasionally remained there till six o'clock, and she had determined to take the chance of finding him, so she sate, as the cab sped rapidly eastward, counting the minutes which still remained to her.

Counting them with her eyes, her mind was counting up other things. As soon as thought had recovered its power, like lightning had come the remembrance of that previous intimacy of her husband's with Goldsmith, under pretext of which he had introduced himself at Kirton's Farm. The

lawyer must be able to tell her whether her marriage had been the mockery that woman had asserted it to be. But still she resolutely kept her thoughts from her husband, or his conduct. She was only bent on discovering the truth, and she was counting up all she had ever seen or heard of Goldsmith, and trying to decide whether she could depend on his evidence.

It was a fierce, hard battle : the agony would rise, would plead to be listened to ; but she thrust it back tearlessly, steadily ; she knew if once she let it have its will, her self-mastery would be over, and though the veins in her throat seemed swelling to suffocation, and those on her forehead bound it tightly like knotted ligatures, she kept her sway.

As she left the cab, she met Mr. Goldsmith coming out of his office. He started back in amazement.

“ Why, bless my soul, Mrs. Hallam ! my dear young lady ! who would have thought of seeing you ? What is the matter ? ”

“ I can go in, can't I ? ” She spoke in a quick, determined tone, that showed Goldsmith something serious had happened.

Without answering, he led the way to his private room, and asked her to be seated.

“I am delighted to see you, my dear madam—delighted; but it is by the merest chance you found me. If I had not stayed to answer a letter, that, in the common course of things, should have been left till to-morrow, I fear you would have had a fruitless journey; and now, may I have the pleasure of knowing what has brought you here?”

His usual smile was checked, for Hester had risen from her seat and stood looking at him with an intensity of expression that frightened him. She was very pale, but her eyes were unnaturally bright and restless, and her lips were pressed together so tightly that they looked as colourless as her cheeks.

Still she did not speak; she seemed to be searching the man's soul with that earnest glance, and to be troubled at not finding what she sought, for I have said before Mr. Goldsmith's was not a face calculated to inspire implicit trust.

He felt alarmed, and turned yellower than ever, looking over his shoulder as if he expected to see some one. Had she lost her senses, or what

made her stare in that way? her coming to the office alone too; he began to return her earnest gaze; but her first words showed him that she was not insane.

“Mr. Goldsmith, you must excuse me; I know I am acting in a strange unusual manner for so young a woman; but when you have heard me, you will say I am justified in my conduct.”

He began to deprecate any such idea, using his white handkerchief and smiling; but she bent her head gravely and went on,—

“I want to know, Mr. Goldsmith—and I charge you to answer me truly, by the memory of my father, who I believe was a good friend to you,” Goldsmith shivered slightly under her earnest words—“whether you had ever mentioned me to—to Mr. Hallam as a *suitable* wife, before he came the first time to Kirton’s Farm?”

He could not help changing countenance a little.

“My dear young lady, what is the drift of this question? it involves so much. You must excuse me, but I must know what you are aiming at before I can answer you in any way satisfactorily.”

Hester looked at him scornfully.

"If I only want the truth, I cannot see why the end signifies."

"Ah, so like a woman!" The lawyer rubbed his hands, and then buried his face in his pocket-handkerchief. "You must excuse me, Mrs. Hallam"—Hester shrank from the sound of her own name—"if I say I can hardly take upon me to recollect all I may, or may not, have then said to my young friend in reference to so very charming a person as yourself."

She walked straight up to him and held him by the arm with a firm grasp, as if she feared he would slip away from her and leave her question unanswered.

"You are not answering my meaning, sir. You know what I want you to tell me about, as well as I do. Now, Mr. Goldsmith, look at me; I am young and ignorant and friendless, but I have a strong will, and I never yet formed a set purpose that I have not accomplished, so far as it depended on myself: if I understand my father's will rightly, I shall depend wholly on myself after I am of age?"

"Precisely so, my dear young lady—subject always to my counsels, which I feel convinced

you are too sensible ever to require. I begin to see daylight," he continued to himself; "some money trouble in which that precious spendthrift has involved her already—poor thing, poor thing!—and she's tired of him." He smiled to himself as if the idea were not unwelcome.

"Well, then, it will of course be in my power to continue to employ you in the management of my affairs or not, as I may think fit." He tried hard to interrupt her, but she would not hear him. "Now, Mr. Goldsmith, listen to me. For my father's sake and for my own I wish to trust you implicitly, but this must rest entirely on your truth to me. I tell you plainly you must choose between me and—and"—her voice slightly faltered—"my husband in this matter; you cannot, from what I have been told, keep faith with both to-day—"

"What have you been told, and who by?" interrupted the lawyer, as the remembrance of the little agreement he had drawn up for Mr. Hallam and which he had never seen destroyed, flashed across his mind.

"Never mind what I have been told, or who has told me; you are only losing time, Mr. Goldsmith. I thought you would have understood that I was

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in earnest when I said I had a strong will." She looked so sternly at him that he absolutely felt afraid of flinching from her steady gaze. "Once again I ask you, in the plainest words I can use—did Mr. Hallam marry me because he loved me, or was it a plot, a pre-arranged plan, because he needed money, and knew that I should be rich?"

Goldsmith stood speechless, uncertain how to act; he could not force himself to answer truthfully, he did not dare to tell her a falsehood in her present mood.

"I will make it still easier for you," she said, his silence strengthening her certainty of the worst; her blood seemed turning to ice, and her heart felt leaden. "If my father had suspected my attachment and refused his consent to our marriage, left his money away from me, would Frederic Hallam have married me then?"

She spoke firmly, but so dispassionately, so unlike a woman, that it was impossible she was speaking of any one she loved. It might have been, for anything there was of emotion in her manner, of some one she had never seen.

Still Goldsmith's habitual caution made him hesitate.

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"But will you not tell me so much as this," he said, after having rapidly calculated which side it would be the best policy to take in this dispute—"what end are you aiming at? You cannot get a separation from your husband on such a ground as this."

"I am not thinking of it," said Hester, sadly—oh, so sadly! her sternness could scarcely be maintained, now that each moment she felt more and more convinced of the truth of the accusation. "Once more—will you or will you not help your old friend's child? I am not judging you hardly, you are Mr. Hallam's friend, and I respect you for trying to defend him. But you are my guardian, and therefore should in this matter take a father's part towards me. Oh, sir!" she continued, passionately, clasping her hands as the intense emotion, so long subdued, found vent in words, "do not mind my hardness—I could not help it—but tell me—tell a woman whose heart will not bear this fearful doubt any longer; tell me, I entreat—I implore you—if I have good reason for my fear."

"You have," he said, carried out of himself, by her impassioned manner, too strongly to wear his

usual precautionary mask ; “but,” he added, as he saw the colour, which had risen with agitation, fade to ashy whiteness, while her whole frame quivered as if struck, “who is to say that warm affection has not, or at any rate may not, replace the former feeling?”

“Hush!” she said, quietly; “no more words now; you might have spared me some before, Mr. Goldsmith.”

She turned to leave the office, slowly and heavily.

“You will allow me to discharge your cab, and to take you home. We shall find my carriage waiting by this time.”

She only shook her head, but when he repeated his offer, the stern look returned, and he dared not insist, although he felt unwilling to let her depart alone.

“How strange in one so young!” he thought, as he seated himself in his brougham; “I must be careful; she requires no common management.”

He need not have feared how she would get home; Hester was neither faint nor hysterical when she reached Gloucester Place.

It was dinner-time, and she came downstairs,

and went through the formal mockery, as if no blight had fallen on the flowers of her young life's happiness, as if she were still the same girl she had risen in the morning. But then she gave orders that she was not to be disturbed again—she required nothing more; and the words were uttered in a stern strange tone of command, that made the servants wonder at the change that had come over the young lady.

A change indeed. She felt stunned; she had no tears to loosen and carry off the oppression that clung about her heart and brain, as if to suffocate her. She could only think—think—think.

Strangely distinct among all that had happened since, stood out in memory the day of her father's death; this seemed so like it. She had sat then motionless beside him, wondering sometimes if it were a nightmare-like dream, and if it would not soon be over. She had never known either, how dearly she had loved her father till she lost him, and now she felt too she had not known before how dearly she had loved the man she thought her husband was. There was a dreadful justice in her character—justice untempered with mercy—

and she knew it. She would have given much now to be only a gentle, loving, forgiving woman, but it was impossible; and she was far too real to give way to vain longings for what might not be.

She looked upon what had happened as a punishment sent to her, for what she had often thought of—the readiness with which she had listened to Frederic Hallam, so soon after her father's death. How soon she had forgotten her grief in his society! Not once had she troubled herself to think whether he was the son-in-law her father would have chosen, although—and she started now as, in the intensity of her retrospection, the thought was forced upon her—she remembered how abruptly and decidedly he had checked all inquiries concerning him, after his first visit to Kirton's Farm. At last tears came stealing down, as she thought that, in that iron nature of her father's, which had seemed to repel human love and sympathy, there had, at any rate, been truth and honesty, for had he ever owed any man anything? “How far more precious than mere alluring outward show!” thought Hester, and her tears ceased suddenly, as the picture of what she now considered her husband rose before her.

She had just been pitilessly severe to herself, for she really had been deeply saddened by her father's death. But, with the usual error of singularly just natures, she was hard in her judgments, would not admit excuses; and her husband's crime, as she called it, seemed to her unpardonable. The Frederic that she had loved, that she still loved, was not her husband. She could see the two characters side by side, and as circumstance after circumstance—noted, although till now without full comprehension—uncoiled from memory's inner recesses, she decided that the one she had worshipped had been but a fair mask—a brightly painted seeming of the corruption within. She was married to a man who could both speak and act a falsehood—who still regarded her, not as a wife to be loved and honoured, but as a means of raising money for his self-indulgent extravagance. And then her future life spread itself out before her, and she asked herself, gravely and firmly, if she could pass it with such a man as she had just been contemplating. The answer did not come readily. Once she thought—it was love's last effort, before the gates were finally barred against him—that when she saw her husband, old

feelings might return. He might—and here was a ray in the darkness—yet learn to love her ; but the withering scorn that sprang up against herself, for such worse than childish weakness, stifled the hope even in its birth.

“ Have I not appealed to his love and his truth, and has he not lied to me ? ” was the stern answer she made herself.

But resolve seemed difficult. She could harden herself against him ; still no definite answer would come as to how she must act. She sought no comfort, no guidance, but in herself ; self-contained, self-reliant, hour after hour she sate ; not worried or doubting, but confident, when these brain-clouds of weakness and emotion should have passed, that she should see her way clear before her.

Here was a resolve at last, and a refreshing thankfulness cooled her fevered brain as it came. She would think no more to-night. She would go to bed and sleep ; in the morning her brain would be clearer, and her mind more calm.

But although the will may be and is almost omnipotent in such natures as Hester's, it is not quite so. She tried to sleep, and at first sank into

what seemed likely to be unbroken slumber. But it did not last—she started into sudden wakefulness. In a moment sleep seemed to have left her. All her lost hopes—all the sorrow for the happiness she had fancied her own in her husband's love—concentrated in a sudden speechless, tearless agony. If she could only die—and she thought she must, for surely this was the pain of heart-breaking she had heard of—and then she searched back into memory, clung as a drowning wretch might for refuge from this pain; but all aid seemed futile and helpless, when she tried to grasp it, as straws floating along the river. Like a poor drowning wretch, I said. Hester was in far worse plight, as yet she was more like a grand old heathen, in her blind self-reliance, than a baptized Christian.

She felt she was hopeless—friendless; so she seemed to be, as far as regarded human sympathy, and she sought for no higher love or help.

For a moment she thought of Lucy. Should she go to her? But how could she reveal to any of her own relations that her grand marriage had been a mockery and a falsehood from beginning to end? And, besides, the thought of Lucy and Jacob, and

their happiness, was a fresh agony. Ah! how much happier to have been as poor as her cousin, then perhaps some one would have loved her for herself, some one—who—were not all men the same? Jacob seemed to make Lucy happy now, but who could tell what the end might be? Perhaps it might be better that *her* trial had come so soon; the longer it had gone on, the harder it would have seemed to endure. Now she had said good-bye to Love for ever, and yet, deep down in her heart—almost unknown to herself—lurked a desperate hope that it might not be true; that something in her husband's face, when he returned, would tell her he had married her because he loved her

So the night slowly wore away—a night of agony sufficient to change a young blooming girl into a hard, determined woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. GOLDSMITH'S MEDITATIONS.

FREDERIC HALLAM did not stand long bending his eyes on the flying horses.

In a few moments his fate was decided, and he knew all was lost. But after the first severe mortification at his want of luck or skill, which seemed to affect him quite as much as the actual loss of money, his fertile brain, over-excited by the day's events, began to plan some mode of extrication from his embarrassments. The first thing to be done was to write to Goldsmith, and tell him plainly that unless he supplied him more liberally, he should raise money elsewhere on his wife's property;—and then he was far too exhausted to go on thinking, and at Tatton there was plenty of amusement to be found for those who sought to get rid of importunate care.

Sooner than he expected on the second day, he received Goldsmith's letter.

The lawyer expressed his extreme regret at his being again in want of money, but intimated that it would be in every way desirable that he should once more apply to him before he carried his threat into execution.

Looking at Hallam's face as he read this letter, any one would have thought his cares at an end.

"I've brought the old Jew to his senses, have I, at last," he said, joyfully; "now I'll just make him settle this little business and double our income as well; that will enable me to live comfortably, and also to refund the interest to Hester's account. I begin to see Goldsmith was a much cleverer fellow than I took him for, when he tied the money so tightly on her; he said it was for my sake, because he saw I should always be careless with money, and, therefore, whatever scrapes I got into, I should always be secure. After all, what's hers is really mine; poor little thing, I believe she'd sign her soul away to please me. I wish she were different, a little more childlike and lively;" (he forgot his last rebuke) "but she's growing such a woman, that perhaps

by the time she really is of age, I may find her less easy to manage; however, there's no time to lose now."

He was soon on the road to London, and, sending his man home with his luggage, took his way straight to Goldsmith's office.

It was still early, and the lawyer had been seated in deep thought ever since he reached his office—thought of an unusual kind, too.

Hester had made a far deeper impression than she was aware of on the subtle schemer, who, both by nature and profession, was accustomed to harden himself against emotion. But he could yield to its appeal in this case without any betrayal of weakness. Hester was his client, *par excellence*; his interests were bound up in hers far more closely than she knew of, and although it would have been more congenial to him to have persisted in an evasive reply on the previous evening, yet for once the truth served his purpose better than any double-dealing. And yet he did not feel easy. Her words, "your dead friend's child," haunted him, and he seemed to see her grief-stricken eyes wherever he turned. He had always thought her cold and childish; but had he and Hallam

both been mistaken, and did she love her husband like any other fond, foolish woman, after all? If she did, what an agony of mortification and despair he must have inflicted on her; for Mr. Goldsmith had seen a good deal of women in his time, and knew what depths of grief they were capable of.

Hester's face would haunt him this morning, not for its own sake only; it carried him back long ago, to the village where he and Ralph Kirton had both been born—to a quiet seat in the church-yard under a broadly spreading yew-tree—a young girl, almost as fair, although more rustic looking than Hester, sate there, her head on the shoulder of a youth about to seek his fortunes in London; how sad her blue eyes were, how full of coming sorrow, when she said, “Don't forget me, Godfrey; oh, don't forgot me, or my heart will break!” He remembered he had kissed her and vowed eternal truth and constancy; but even then his heart had been more full of his future than of her present—and what had happened? His future had become a present brighter than he could have pictured; she was of the past now, for he had soon forgotten her, her heart had broken—and she was at rest.

He sate now, wondering if this grief would prove as fatal to Hester. He felt uneasy and restless, he wished he could get her out of his head—that calm self-controlled grief, for her eyes told him it was grief, had moved him far more deeply than any passionate outburst.

It was strange that he should have felt so uneasy, when he must have known how much his mediation might have still availed between Hester and her husband. Who shall say that it was not that very knowledge that made him uneasy? Was he really so very anxious to see his friend's child happy in her married life? The unusual emotion which seemed to be mastering him this morning, answered "Yes;" but when he considered her position fully in relation to himself, he found so much weighty argument on the other side, that his restlessness returned strongly, and he started up and paced his office.

No man, even of Mr. Goldsmith's type, makes up his mind to a downward step without a struggle. But where feeling *only* has to fight the battle against self-interest, the strife will not be very long, nor its issue doubtful.

He had just turned his attention to some matters

of business, when a clerk came to say Mr. Hallam was below, and wished to see him.

“Ask him to come upstairs.”

He took one more restless walk across his room, and then stood facing the door to await his visitor.

Frederic Hallam looked far more radiant, more like himself, than the last time he had visited his wife's guardian.

But Mr. Goldsmith did not allow him to begin the conversation.

His face seemed to have elongated, and to have become suddenly jaundiced, as the door opened to admit his visitor, and his voice expressed deep commiseration, not unmixed with reproof, as he deplored Hallam's ill-fortune at the races.

“Well, never mind,” said Hallam, cheerfully; “better luck next time; but it makes plain to you, I should think, that I was right when I told you, you cut our means of living too close; honestly, Goldsmith, you will save yourself and me a good deal of trouble and annoyance, if you just double the figure at once.”

“My dear sir!” exclaimed the lawyer, hands and chin both expressing his surprise, “I hoped these

losses would have sobered you down, brought you into bounds, but you are worse than ever. Dear me, dear me ! now I wonder," he continued, looking furtively at Hallam, "what my charming ward would say to this little proposition of yours ; but, of course, it has been mentioned between you."

Hallam laughed.

"Now, Goldsmith, you are too absurd ; in the first place, I've not seen Hester since I went to Tatton, and in the next, is it likely I should talk business to her ? Why, what on earth can she know about it ?"

A strange light gleamed in the lawyer's eyes when Hallam said he had not seen his wife ; he paused for a few moments before he replied,—

"And yet, my dear sir, Mrs. Hallam must be called on to understand business, and before very long, too, nor do I think you will find her unapt. You are aware that, after she comes of age, her signature will be absolutely necessary in any little business matters."

The excitement of his rapid journey, and the relief Goldsmith's letter had given him, had thrown Hallam off his guard ; but now there

was something in the lawyer's look and tone that struck him as hostile. When he spoke again, it was in a far more guarded tone.

"You said you wished me to come to you, so I imagine you have some proposition to make; but mind you, Goldsmith, I must square these Tatton matters off-hand."

The lawyer shook his head mournfully.

"You must allow me to remonstrate with you, Mr. Hallam, indeed you must," the words sounded humble, but the tone was insolent. "Dear me, dear me! if my poor old friend could but see how the fine fortune he built up is being gambled away without any benefit, that I can see, accruing to his daughter, surely he would not rest in his grave."

Hallam chafed, but still he kept his temper.

"Stay a moment, Goldsmith; did you exact any promise from me, when I married your friend's daughter, against betting, or did you not rather recommend a rich marriage to me as a safe means of indulging in such amusements? But, now, I didn't come here to recriminate; you may make your mind easy about me; I don't mind saying I've had a smart lesson this time, and I dare say I shall be more careful; but it would be much

better to tempt me to be prudent, and this you might do, by doubling our income at once."

The lawyer looked at him as if he thought he had taken leave of his senses, but Hallam went on before he could interrupt.

"Yes, I should certainly learn to economize, because I greatly desire to pay regular interest for the money with which you are now going to settle those debts; perhaps in time I may be able to replace the whole sum. I think it will be a far better plan to have it advanced to me at once, than to be constantly troubling you with money transactions."

Mr. Goldsmith stroked his chin meditatively with his thumb and his two first fingers.

"You are speaking, I presume, of your wife's fortune," he said, slowly. "Well, it would, as you say, save trouble—always supposing Mrs. Hallam's consent attainable to such an arrangement."

"I will answer for that," said the young man, haughtily; "but at present I believe the increase of income rests mainly with you. And I am quite as anxious to get one point settled as the other."

"Well, now," said Goldsmith, still reflectively, as he lounged back in his easy-chair; "I always prefer settling one thing at a time. How is this

matter to be settled? will you drop me a line, to say when I can wait on Mrs. Hallam; or how shall it be?"

"Oh, there is no occasion to worry Hester too much with business before her time," said Hallam, smiling. "She will do all I want, so don't tease her beforehand. You just draw up what's necessary, and send it, and I'll see that she signs it."

"Her signature is not required at present, although I prefer consulting her on so important a matter. You must excuse me, my dear sir, if I appear somewhat formal. It is the first time I have been called on to take such serious steps in behalf of my fair client, and I should wish to have an interview with her before I come to any decision. I am sure Mrs. Hallam will expect it of me."

Hallam looked hard at him—what did he mean?—it would be a nice thing for him to begin to meddle between husband and wife, and yet he was too quick not to see that it would not do to quarrel with him.

"Suppose you dine with us this evening; won't that do?" he said, carelessly, as if not choosing to see the doubt of him the lawyer's words had implied.

"Thank you! no; I always prefer to settle these

little things in the morning. Shall we say to-morrow morning, at any time most convenient to Mrs. Hallam, or——”

“Very well ; I'll send you a note in the course of the day ; but let me have this clear : directly you hand me over what I have asked you for, you will take into consideration the other plan, which is really quite as important. You can't fancy what a thing it is, or how absurd it makes a man look, to be always hard up, and yet to feel he has a right to be spending thousands. By Jove ! it's not the thing at all.”

Mr. Goldsmith shook his head, and sighed ; he was in a dolorous mood this morning, from which Fred could not rouse him.

“Such a sum,” he murmured ; “really, I assure you, my dear sir, I had to read your letter twice, before I could believe you could have incurred such a venture. But you said just now, you expected I had a proposition to make you ; and so I have. If Mrs. Hallam is so indulgent to your extravagance, as to consent to your having the means of paying for it at once—so much the better, no doubt—although, as I said before, it grieves me to the very soul, to see my old friend's fortune made

ducks and drakes of. But in making this proposition to Mrs. Hallam, you must be very careful—very careful, and must remember that you are altogether dependent on her generosity for anything besides the annual payment made you out of the property.”

Hallam bit his lips, and thought, “Insolent Jew, my day will come;” but his power of self-control kept him outwardly calm.

“Not much fear of my forgetting it, all things considered,” he said, bitterly; “spite of all your plausible reasons, I consider it was a mistake to make a man dependent on his wife,” and he rose to go.

“A moment more; you seem to forget that you will very soon be of age, according to the peculiar provisions of your father’s will, and that in due time you must inherit both from your respected mother, Mrs. Hallam senior, and from your aunt: would not that suffice?”

Hallam shrugged his shoulders; he did not choose to tell Goldsmith that the greater part of his father’s inheritance had been anticipated long ago. But the lawyer, who guessed as much, went on, unheeding him.

“Your notions, doubtless, may have influenced your wife’s; but, carefully as she has been brought up, I apprehend that the mere mention of such a sum as you require will shock and grieve her beyond measure.” He paused, and, from the shelter of his handkerchief, looked sideways at the young man, and, seeing an impatient gesture, he went on: “Taking this into due consideration, my proposition would be that *you* do not mention the matter at all to her, but allow me gently to arrange it for you, when I see Mrs. Hallam.”

Frederic Hallam, throughout their interview, had not been insensible to the change in the lawyer’s manner; he had been too worldly-wise to resent it hitherto, but this was more than he could bear, as the lawyer intended it to be.

“You are very kind and considerate, Mr. Goldsmith; but I see you don’t quite, as a single man, comprehend the terms on which husbands and wives live together; as I told you before, I think your preliminary meeting with my wife wholly unnecessary; she will, of course, do all I wish in this matter. And now I won’t make any further trespass on your valuable time.”

And with a hurried leave-taking he departed.

Mr. Goldsmith looked after his visitor as he closed the door with a peculiar and very unpleasant smile, slowly rubbing his chin the while, and decided, in his own mind, that his dear young friend had become far less sharp-witted since his marriage.

CHAPTER XVII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

FREDERIC HALLAM walked along towards his home, irritable and excited, and very much dissatisfied with himself for being so.

But for Goldsmith's words, he would have considered it the most natural thing in the world to ask Hester's consent to any arrangement in his favour; he did not feel under any obligation to her, it was all the other way. What sacrifice had she made in marrying him? However, it was absurd to be annoyed about it. Goldsmith meant nothing; he was an old prig, and liked to show his power; still there had been a very unpleasant look in his face several times during the interview; perhaps it was natural he should be reluctant to emancipate any one from his clutches, for Fred vowed to himself, if only

his income were doubled, he would take good care to live within it: all else apart, he began to feel ashamed of having, as Goldsmith said, "made ducks and drakes of so much money."

After all, he owed him a mere trifle now. The ready money paid down to his account at the time of his marriage, had been nearly all devoted to liquidating the lawyer's claims upon him. The young man thought of this as he walked along.

"He got a great deal more by my marriage than I did," he said to himself.

He seemed to prefer walking this morning; it seemed to give him more time to think. Of course, nothing that Goldsmith had said could give him any real hesitation in speaking to Hester about money matters, and yet he evidently was not impatient to reach Gloucester Place. He had returned a day sooner than the time named in his letter. Hester would be surprised to see him; he hoped she would not make a scene by rushing out to the street door, or anything of that kind. She meant it all for the best, but it was a silly thing to do; if it were not for this worry about the money, he should be rather pleased to see her again, poor little thing!

Meditating in this discursive fashion, he arrived at home.

Parkins was coming down-stairs as the street-door was opened.

She started to see her master.

"We did not expect you till to-morrow, sir."

"Ah, no; I suppose not; how is your mistress?"

"Not very well, I think, sir; at least she don't look well. I'm glad you've come home, sir."

And the discreet damsel threw open the door of the dining-room.

"Not here? then I suppose my mistress is up-stairs in the drawing-room."

"No, never mind, I'll find her; your mistress won't be frightened; it's better than coming home a day too late, you know, Parkins," he said, smiling; and he walked up-stairs alone.

Hester was sitting in the drawing-room. She rose as he entered, but she looked self-possessed, evidently not frightened nor surprised. In some mysterious way, we generally are warned of our approaching fate. I do not mean that there is any visible token, but whether it be that the previous expectation has so wrought on our nervous system, as to render its perceptions

unnaturally acute, or that there is a mysterious sympathy between persons, which makes each cognisant of the approach of the other, it is certain that Hester had sat expecting her husband for the last two hours.

With the natural contradiction of human nature, he felt disappointed that she was not surprised. But her great beauty struck him unusually. She had more colour than he was accustomed to see her with; for she had flushed deeply as he entered, and as she still stood after his greeting, he thought she certainly was quite as dignified in appearance as Lady Helena, although her movements might be less graceful. And he could not help feeling proud of her. Her first words dispelled the charm; they were so harshly uttered. She had schooled herself to be calm and just.

“Are you hungry? Did you breakfast very early?”

“Yes, perhaps I might as well have a glass of sherry and a biscuit. I can have it here, you know; I never eat luncheon.”

He threw himself comfortably into an easy-chair, and thought, as his wife walked to the bell, that she would in time be a very fine woman, and

do him credit. But she certainly was the most silent, undemonstrative creature he had ever met with. Still that was a fault quite on the right side.

"Well, how have you been, Hester, while I was away—all right? Fortescue gave you my message—has any one else been?"

"Captain Fortescue called one evening," she turned very pale again now, "and yesterday Lady Helena Fortescue called also."

"What on earth"—began Hallam, impatiently; and then noticing his wife's earnest look, he said, "You didn't see her, did you?"

"Yes, I saw her, and talked to her."

"Not much, I should fancy,"—his wife's sententious manner annoyed him. "You don't seem particularly glad to see me, Hester."

"I am very glad you are come."

"I declare," he said, with one of his sweet smiles, "you have grown more cut and dried than ever, while I have been away. I must not leave you alone so long again, must I, little woman? You've got quite moped."

The soft colour flitted over her cheek once more, and her eyes looked softly into his.

"Now, where would you like to go this after-

noon?" he continued. "I've only got a tiresome note to write to old Goldsmith, and then I'll do exactly what you like, the rest of the day."

Her heart gave a joyful leap, and her lips dimpled into a trustful smile as he spoke; but Goldsmith's name made her compress them tightly again.

Hallam did not see the change; he went straight on, without looking at her.

"By-the-by, I'm in want of rather a large sum just now; I've had ill-luck at Tatton—it's a bore, for I stood to win immensely—and Goldsmith thinks the best way is to take it out of what is coming to us, you know."

She looked hard and stern enough now, and the colour faded entirely, but until she spoke he did not raise his eyes; then the change struck him. What had happened? she had grown ten years older in his absence.

"Is this Mr. Goldsmith's own plan?"

"We both thought well of it."

"Then why is it mentioned to me?"

"Because of some legal nonsense or other, which requires your consent; just a form, you understand?"

“Only a form—yes, I want to understand exactly; if I refuse, you cannot have the money; is that what you mean?”

Indolent as Frederic Hallam felt after his hurried journey, he started to his feet in sheer astonishment. That a girl, a mere child in matters of business, should at once have seen the only part of the transaction he wished her to be ignorant of, completely puzzled him. What could have put such an idea in her head?

“You’re joking now,” he said. “I told Goldsmith I would find out from you what you wished, and when you would see him, so that no time might be lost. Shall I say to-morrow morning, at ten o’clock?”

Her remark had annoyed him, and he did not make this request quite so courteously as he otherwise would have done.

“I wish to speak to Mr. Goldsmith alone, before I consent to anything,” said Hester, gravely.

He looked vexed now.

“How absurd, Hester! What is the use of making all this fuss? Don’t you understand that this is a debt of honour, which must be paid as soon as possible? You don’t suppose I should

wish to spend our money unnecessarily; however, as you seem to wish to become a woman of business, I can explain the matter to you as well as Goldsmith can."

He threw himself into his chair again, and turned towards her. She had grown paler than he had ever seen her, but she did not seem faint, only as if her face were chiselled in marble.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Hester? are you ill? you're as white as a sheet."

"I'm not ill," she said, "but I want to say a few serious words to you. I prefer hearing these business matters you speak of from Mr. Goldsmith, and, as the money you want is mine, I think my wish in this matter should be studied."

He could not bear it; he forgot all prudence, all forbearance. It had never entered into his calculations that Hester could consider her interests separate from his, and he told her so, adding that he thought she ought to remember all he had sacrificed in marrying her, and try at least to be a dutiful, yielding wife on a point where their interests must be mutual, and that she should not talk at random on subjects about which she could know nothing.

"I am not talking at random," she said, so slowly, so calmly that it quieted him in a moment. "I have had time for thought during my lonely hours lately, Frederic Hallam. I am no longer a child, and I have been trying to learn the true relations that ought to exist between husband and wife. In yours towards me," and her lips quivered with the passionate scorn she could no longer suppress, "there has been falsehood from beginning to end."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FREDERIC HALLAM PAYS HIS DEBTS.

AN hour had passed, and still Mr. Hallam remained in the drawing-room.

Parkins's curiosity and excitement had been roused to a most unusual point—to a point which had by this time carried her to the landing by the staircase window.

At first, as she stood in the hall beneath, she heard Mrs. Hallam speaking in indignant, earnest tones, and then the husband's voice seemed to break in angrily, but she was called down to dinner at this juncture, and, for the time, her curiosity subsided. But when she came upstairs again, all sound had ceased. There was dead silence in the upper part of the house.

Perhaps they had parted; perhaps her master had come down into the dining-room; she knew

he had not gone out, for she had not heard the street-door close. She stood for a moment, and, while she hesitated, came the sharp, quick tread, followed by the ring of the postman, and the click of the letter-box.

Here was what she wanted: an excuse for going into the dining-room.

But it was empty, and she saw that the letter was only a pamphlet open at each end.

She dared not venture into the drawing-room to disturb her mistress in her present mood about a trifle like this, and again she asked herself whatever could have happened to make Mrs. Hallam look and speak as she had done since Lady Helena Fortescue's visit.

But again there were voices upstairs, and, as I have said, Parkins followed their sound.

They were not speaking loud now. Mr. Hallam seemed to be giving short, sullen answers to what his wife was saying; but they evidently had both resumed self-control, and did not wish to be overheard; all was confused murmur, except the different tones of the speakers.

Parkins felt desperate. It had been a risk, knowing, as she did, Hester's sudden, rapid move-

ments, to venture upstairs at all ; but as the boy who climbs the orchard wall for one apple, seldom returns without filling all his pockets, so, having braved one risk, she determined to go close to the drawing-door, and try if the sounds were more audible. But before she reached it, there was a sudden pause and movement within ; she hesitated, and well for her that she did so.

Hester's voice, in loud, distinct tones, said,—

“On those terms, and those only, I consent to remain with you as your wife ; when you have decided, I will write to Mr. Goldsmith.”

The next moment the door opened, and she stood close to Parkins, who affected to be coming upstairs, with the letter in her hand.

Hester's face was deeply flushed, her lips scarcely visible, so tightly were they pressed together. She started, and looked severely at the woman, who, in positive fear, forgot that the paper was addressed to Mr. Hallam, and put it into Hester's hand.

“This is for your master ; he is in the drawing-room ;” and she had passed up to her bedroom before Parkins recovered from her flutter of terror. Had she been less frightened, she must have been

struck by the strange change that had passed over Mrs. Hallam.

Still, she was anxious to see her master. "What had he been doing, and how could Mrs. Hallam venture to speak in such a way as that to her lawful husband?"

Frederic Hallam did not turn round when the door was opened. He was standing in the farthest window of the back room; his forehead pressed against the sill, and both hands clasped behind him. Parkins could not see his face, but the attitude in which he stood, with bent head and shoulders, half crouched, as if all manhood had been crushed out of him, touched her.

There was something in his manner and temperament that had always made him popular with inferiors. Parkins felt quite sure, whoever was to blame, it was not Mr. Hallam, and without trying to disturb him, she laid the letter on the table, and left the room more gently than she had entered it.

She was not one of the gossiping class of servants; she was rather one of those who observe and note accurately and silently all that happens among their employers, and she had sense enough

to feel this matter was too serious to be talked about, either to Martin or the servants of the house; but she saw some change was impending, and watched anxiously to see how all would end.

There was much coming and going for several days; letters and messages from and to Mr. Goldsmith's office, and, finally, came that gentleman himself.

But he had only a short interview with Mrs. Hallam, and although he came late—after six o'clock—he was not asked to stay dinner.

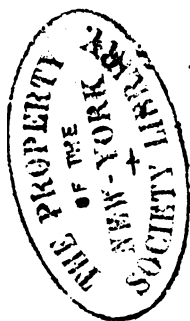
The next morning, Mrs. Hallam summoned Parkins, and asked if she objected to a country life, supposing that her wages were considerably increased.

The woman hesitated; she feared Mrs. Hallam now; but there was something in the whole story that interested and fascinated her; she felt as if she must see it to the end, so she said she had no wish to leave.

And in a week's time it was known at his club, that before the season was over, Frederic Hallam had either purchased or rented an estate about eighty miles from London, and that he had gone

there with his wife—gone there, it was said, without communicating his intentions to any one.

Some said it was all a myth, that he had had serious losses on the turf, and had slipped off quietly to the Continent; others contradicted this, and declared positively that he had paid his debts. While others—and this tale began in Lady Helena's morning-room—said that he was heartily ashamed of his awkward wife, and had really buried himself alive with her in this country house; and these prophesied that next season he would reappear among them as free a man as ever, having left Mrs. Hallam to cultivate cabbages.



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